

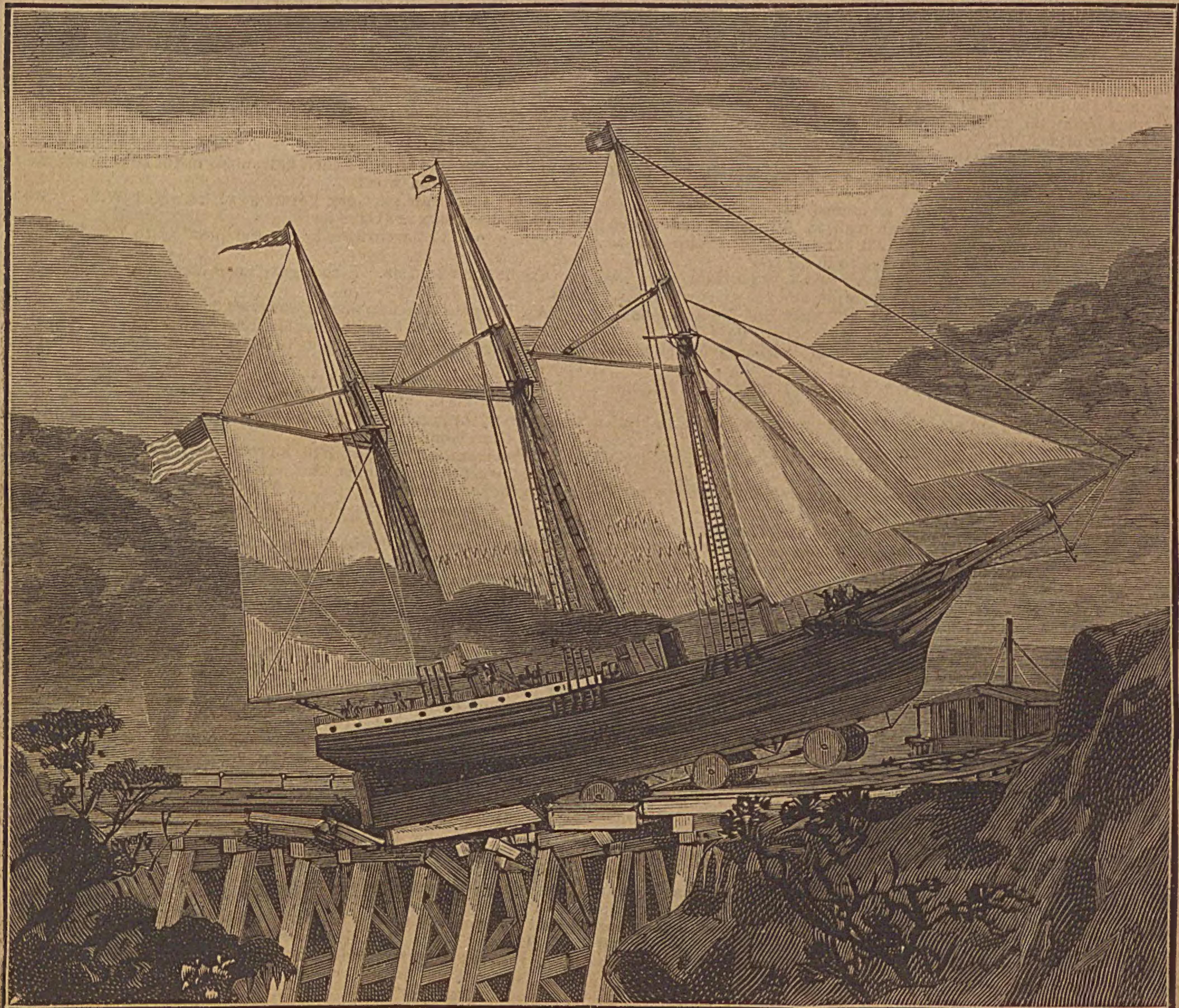
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A Ship on Wheels; THE WONDER
or, Of Hurricane Coast
By ROGER STARBUCK.



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A Ship on Wheels:

OR,

The Wonder of Hurricane Coast.

A LEGEND OF THE Isthmus.

By ROGER STARBUCK,

Author of "The Demon Captain," "The Poisoned Ship," "The Two Boy Wanderers," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A CURIOUS SHIP.

"A quick death must be the fate of the man who sails aboard that strange looking craft. I, for one, would not like to be of her crew. With that steam pipe so far forward, the first heavy sea would, I should think, carry her down head foremost, never to rise again."

The speaker was Will Trueman, a young American sailor of sixteen, the son of Captain John Trueman, who, after the death of his wife, two years before the present time, had temporarily retired from the active duties of sea life.

His wife, who had accompanied him on a voyage, had died and was buried near Honolulu, and there with his son, the captain had dwelt since then in a little house on the Old Road.

The remarks quoted above were addressed by young Trueman to one of the Kanaka boatmen who for a real (12 1-2 cents) had rowed him out from the landing that he might have a swim and also take a look at the strange craft he had alluded to in his speech.

The peculiarities of the ship besides her small proportions, were her light rig aft, her heavy steam works forward, and her narrow beam.

"Me t'ink him quick go to de bottom!" answered the dusky boatman.

"What a small ship she is, too," said Will. "She cannot be more than 250 tons."

"So you do not think well of her? I am not surprised!" cried some one behind the boy.

Turning he beheld a lad of about his own age in another boat, heading for the ship.

He was a tall, nimble youth of dark complexion, with ruddy cheeks and very bright eyes.

"Halloo! You are the son of the owner of that ship, are you not?" said Will.

"Yes," answered the other boy, motioning the Kanaka at the oars to stop pulling. "I am Charles Turnwall—son of the ship's owner—the engineer, who called upon Captain Trueman, a few days ago, about taking command of his vessel."

"Well, I remember seeing you. But I had to go out just then on an errand, and when I came back father was gone to Maine, and has not yet come back. Is he to take command of the ship?"

"He has consented. You and I will be shipmates, and may God save our lives! We will have a perilous time! You will go with your father, I suppose?"

"Ay, ay, I always accompany him on his voyages, but anybody would know we are fated to go to the bottom with that heavy 'steam-gear' forward!"

"That can't hurt us. Father, who is an educated engineer, has not neglected to balance the weight forward by heavy stowage aft."

"I see that your ship flies the flag of New Granada at her peak."

"Yes, father is a native of New Granada. My mother, his wife, now dead, was an American. Father assisted in the revolution which freed New Granada from the dominion of Spain. He did his best to help along the triumph of the republican army. When peace was restored, he went to Panama, and turned his attention to a singular plan he had long thought of. For five years he has been at work on his great scheme. Meanwhile he had this ship built, and, to test her sailing qualities, he voyaged to this island. Here the captain and most of the crew, thinking him mad, deserted him. He is not mad, but he is a monomaniac on one subject, which makes him seem so."

"I can't imagine why he put that heavy steam-pipe so far for-

ward," said Will. "It looks dangerous. Then again the ship has not enough beam."

"I see you are stripped to the waist and have been swimming," said the other boy. "Are you a good diver?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, if you could see the bottom of that ship, you'd know she was not likely to capsize."

Will at once jumped from the boat and swam to the ship, which was but a few fathoms off.

Diving and keeping his eyes open under water, the young sailor was treated to a most unexpected sight.

The bottom of the ship proved to be nearly flat, and was crossed at equal distances by two seven-inch galvanized metal bars, about which was much heavy iron work.

"Phew! that beats anything I ever saw!" reflected Will. "Wonder what those bars are there for?"

When he rose to the surface, he put the question to Charley Turnwall.

"You'll know in time. Father gave me orders not to speak of it now."

"Ay, but your ship is a mysterious craft."

"Mysterious and fated!" solemnly answered Charley. "In my opinion father will speedily put us to death in trying to carry out his views."

"Where is the ship bound to?"

"To New York," answered the other boy. "We will use no steam to propel us through the water, and yet father expects to reach New York in three months!"

"Three months," laughed Will, incredulously. "I should like to see the fastest sailing clipper that ever was launched do that. It can't be done, of course!"

"And I believe it can—yes, and perhaps in ten weeks!" was uttered in a deep voice.

Will saw a tall form by the forward rail of the ship.

The head of this person was high and long, the nose was beaked, and thick, black masses of hair hung to the shoulders.

"Father!" cried Charley. "I've been showing Captain Trueman's son the bottom of this ship."

"Hah! Very well. He is welcome to see everything inside and outside of it. Come aboard, my young friend," added the engineer pleasantly, looking down through a pair of glasses at Will, who was now back in the boat.

Having put on the clothing he had taken off for a swim, Will with Charley Turnwall, boarded the ship.

Mr. Turnwall shook hands with him and took him forward to show him the machinery of the steam-works.

This was very complicated, and it seemed to Will that the valves of the high and low pressure cylinder formed one casting.

The engine was compact and all the moving parts were apparently in pairs.

The long connecting rods and the pistons, together with the other numerous works, puzzled and mystified Will, though Mr. Turnwall gave him many animated explanations.

"But what is the machinery for," inquired Will, "since I have heard that you will not use it to propel the ship through the sea?"

"Hah, my boy, hah!" cried the engineer, "you will know in time. Yes, yes, you will know, and, mark my words, in three months from now this craft will be in New York."

"Mad, no mistake!" thought Will.

He went on deck later, where he saw Charley critically surveying some of the craft in the harbor.

"Do you know, friend Will," he said, "I don't like that craft yonder."

He pointed out a small black armed brig, very sharp at the bows, and showing no colors.

"Why, what do you think of her?"

"I have my suspicions and have told them to father, but he thinks differently. In my opinion that craft is a Spaniard, and is lying in wait for this ship to sail, so that she can pounce upon her."

"You really think so?"

"Yes, father, for his former assistance to the revolutionists, is hated by the Spaniards. In my opinion there are many of them who would like to kill him or make him a prisoner."

CHAPTER II.

A CHASE.

On a misty morning a fortnight from the time of Will's first visit to the New Era—such was the name of Turnwall's ship—the cutter with a fair wind passed out of the harbor into the open sea.

Charley Turnwall and Will Trueman had by this time become warm friends.

They now stood on the quarterdeck watching the receding shores of the Island.

On the other side of the deck were Mr. Turnwall, the owner of the ship, and Captain Trueman.

The latter was a short, stout, good-natured sea-dog of forty-five, with keen gray eyes and a weather-beaten visage.

"Ay, ay," he was saying, "your flat bottomed ship don't make very good headway, and what little she does make is deadened by those metal outriggers attached to the bottom. You'll not reach New York in three months at this rate."

But the engineer only laughed and rubbed his hands.

"You shall see, you shall see!" he cried.

Meanwhile Will Trueman allowed his gaze to wander to the men forward, who were coiling ropes, stowing the cable and otherwise putting things in order.

There were no Americans among them.

The fifteen sailors composing the crew were mostly a mixture of Kanakas and Chinese, but besides these, there were two Scotchmen, who Charley had said were to assist his father, when the steam-works were used.

"Those fellows seem to know their business," remarked the engineer's son. "I only hope we can depend on them, in case of an attack."

"An attack? I don't expect anything of that kind," said Will. "The days of pirates are over."

"Ay, of regular sea-going pirates, but just you watch how that fellow seems to be shadowing us."

As he spoke Charley directed his companion's attention to the supposed Spanish brig, which was now emerging from the mist and sailing on a course parallel with that of the New Era.

Will looked at the craft, which was about a quarter of a mile off.

"Halloo! is not that a gun aimed at us, over her quarter-rail?" inquired Charley, pointing out a tube-like projection there.

Will laughed, as he replied:

"It is a spy-glass."

"The fellow who has leveled it toward us, is crouched behind the rail. He is watching us as a cat watches a mouse," said Charley.

"Well, I suppose that's natural. This ship does look queer, with her steam-pipe so far forward."

"Ay, but he has had time enough to watch the ship while anchored in the bay."

"Are there any weapons aboard this craft?" inquired Will.

"Lots of them. Among other things, father has a machine to which he took a fancy and so bought. It is called a 'coffee mill'—a gun affair, with ten barrels or tubes, which can be discharged as fast as you can grind coffee."

"Where is it?"

"In the round-house. We'll go and take a look at it."

Will followed his friend to the round-house.

The curious gun invention, sometimes called the coffee-mill, was not at that time as perfect as now.

It stood upon a tripod, and the tubes were arranged alongside of each other, like those of a barrel organ.

"How do you fire it off?" inquired Will, as he laid a hand on one of the hammers.

"Look out! it is loaded! don't press too hard!" yelled Charley, "or—"

He was interrupted by the report of the piece, as barrel after barrel went off, one after the other.

Captain Trueman sprang into the rigging as he felt the shots whizzing in close proximity to his ears.

Mr. Turnwall ran to leeward.

The crew forward jumped into the fore-shrouds.

But as the shots came in that direction, they jumped down again in their haste, tumbling over each other, and lying in a heap upon the deck.

Meanwhile Charley had crouched in a corner of the round-house.

Will stood aghast at the mischief he had caused.

But, at length, recovering his presence of mind, he kicked the gun over, so that the remaining shot flew straight up through the top of the round-house.

"Anybody hurt?" roared Captain Trueman, as he descended to the deck.

The crew now staggered to their feet, and several of the Chinamen began to feel of their heads.

"Any one hurt?" repeated the captain, walking forward.

"Tellee in a minute, Captain," said one of the Chinamen, as he continued to rub his head. "No—no hurtee—head stillee on shoulder, but killee all samee."

"The man means that he might have been killed," said the engineer, now stepping up, "as indeed he might. That was a perilous accident."

"I hope you will be more careful in future," said the captain to his son, who now came to his side.

"He showed rare presence of mind in kicking over the machine," remarked the engineer.

"I did not think it would go off," said Will.

As he spoke a gun boomed from the brig, which was faintly visible through the mist, and a shot hummed across the New Era's bow.

"They are firing at us from the brig," cried Will, as a second shot passed over the ship's bow.

"Not exactly," said Trueman. "It is a notice to us to heave to."

"What can it mean?" inquired Mr. Turnwall.

"I shouldn't wonder if some of the shot from the coffee mill went toward that craft," said the captain.

"I believe they knew it was an accident," cried Charley. "They only want an excuse to make us heave to."

"We will heave to and see what they have to say," said Mr. Turnwall.

The captain gave the order, and the main-yard was hauled aback.

A boat was then seen heading toward the ship from the brig.

In the stern sheets stood a man wearing the garb of a lieutenant.

When close to the ship he cried out in slightly broken English:

"Captain Esponzo sent me to demand explanation of shot fired at us?"

"It was an accident," answered Mr. Turnwall. "A gun, by careless handling, was discharged. I regret having caused you inconvenience."

The lieutenant looked keenly at the speaker.

"But many shots came. How was that?"

"It was a machine, which you probably never have seen, called a 'coffee mill,' with many barrels."

"Humph! Well, I go and see what my captain say. You must hove to until he come up in speaking distance."

"Oh, father, this is a trick! You can see it is now! cried Charley—a trick to capture you."

"I am inclined to believe you, boy," answered his father.

Then he added aloud to the lieutenant:

"We will not remain hove to, as we prefer to continue on our course."

"Refuse at your peril!" cried the officer, threateningly. "We have ten guns, and could easily sink you."

So saying, he ordered his boat whirled round and headed back toward the brig.

"Brace forward, captain" said Turnwall to Trueman.

The captain promptly gave the order, and the ship was kept on her course.

Meanwhile, all aboard of her watched the receding boat.

They saw it board the brig, which, by now, was nearly hidden by the fog.

Then a flag was seen to shoot up to the vessel's gaff.

"A Spaniard, sure enough! She shows her true colors now!" cried the engineer, as he looked through a spy-glass.

"I told you so, father! I knew it!" cried Charley.

There was a puff of smoke from the brig, and a shot came whizzing toward the ship but fell short.

Then the brig was seen to crowd all sail in pursuit.

CHAPTER III.

A BRAVE BOY.

THE pursuing brig had studding sails, forward.

A moment later top-mast studding sails were also shot out from her main.

But the fog presently became so dense that she was hidden from view.

Then Captain Trueman headed to the westward.

"We are off our course," he said to Turnwall, "but it is better to lose time in eluding that rascal, than to lose more by being overhauled by her."

"Certainly," replied the engineer, "but I am sorry, very sorry anything has happened to put off the carrying out of my grand experiment at Panama."

Will, who stood near, pricked up his ears, hoping the engineer would go on to give him some idea of what that experiment was, but he was disappointed.

"Panama? Is that the place we are bound to?" he inquired of Charley, who stood near.

"Yes, the Isthmus of Panama."

"And what does your father intend to do at Panama?"

"It is a secret, at present. I promised father I would not tell."

"But why is it kept a secret, if it is to come out in time?"

"Because, otherwise the crew might be discontented and cause trouble."

Will said no more to Charley on the subject.

Later he questioned his father.

"I can't tell you, Will. I promised Turnwall not to, but this much I will say, that the engineer has what I think is a strange, hair-brained project, which I believe, is bound to prove a failure."

"Why, then, did you take command of this ship?"

"Because Mr. Turnwall offered me four times the amount of wages I should have obtained in command of any natural, ship-shape craft."

"But suppose the project prove a failure?"

"I will be paid all the same—that is provided I do not lose my life in trying to assist the engineer to carry out his strange plan, which I have promised to do."

"There is danger in it, then?"

"Ay, I should say there was! We may all be dashed to eternal blazes in trying to carry it through!"

"I must say I like that, father!" remarked Will, shrugging his shoulders. "I am young and my life is sweet to me."

"Tell you what it is, Will," said the captain, lowering his voice. "I don't want you to run any peril. You can stay behind."

"Stay behind?"

"Yes, you are to stay behind, and, if you like, you can return to Honolulu by the first craft that sails for that port."

"No, father, I will not stay behind. It would not look well for me to back out of any slight peril in that way."

"Slight? By the living Neptune, in my opinion the peril will be of the strangest and most terrific nature—something that was never incurred before."

"I don't care what it is, I'll stick to you, father, if you undertake to risk it."

"Spoken like a chip of the old hulk!" said the captain admiringly. "I knew you wouldn't sheer out of it, Will, when it came to the point."

So saying, the captain went over to Turnwall on the other side of the deck.

"Well, the Spaniard does not show himself. Would it not now be safe to keep on our course?" said the engineer.

"Ay, I think we can venture to do that now."

Many hours had passed, and the shades of evening were adding to the gloom of the mist.

But the wind was gradually dying away.

Presently a calm fell upon the sea.

Will, who was vainly puzzling his brains to try and fathom the nature of the strange, perilous undertaking his father had hinted at, was seated alone in the quarter-boat.

Suddenly he heard the buzz of a steamer's machinery not far off.

At the same moment a flood of moonlight cleared the fog just to leeward, when a cry of startled surprise broke from the boy.

"Brig not four ships' lengths off!" he said to the second mate who was officer of the watch.

There, true enough, was the Spanish brig, and cries aboard of her indicated that the ship was also seen by those on her decks.

The noise of two boats being lowered was heard, and, as soon as they were down, numerous crews of armed men were seen to man them.

Captain Trueman was called, and he at once proceeded to arm the crew.

"Here they come!" said Charley, as the boats shot from the ship, with the weapons of their occupants glistening in the moonlight.

"We will try the effect of the coffee-mill on them," cried Mr. Turnwall.

The curious gun was soon in position.

It was high enough for its tubes to point over the low bulwarks of the ship.

"Fire!" cried the engineer, "and let them have it."

Charley pressed the hammer, and the steady pop-pop of the "coffee-mill" was heard.

The shots flew rapidly, but the trouble was that the machine could not be sufficiently depressed over the top of the bulwarks for the missiles to take effect.

They passed over the heads of the boats' crews, who were soon nearly alongside.

Trueman stopped the firing, and was about to call the men together, when suddenly the loud whistle of the steamer, which Will had previously heard, came from the fog close at hand.

Then there was a yell as the vessel, which proved to be a large iron ship with a red pipe, crashed into the stay-sail boom of the Spanish craft.

The boom, with the jib and flying-jib-boom, were at once carried away and the upper part of the brig's bow was also smashed.

The steamer slowed up, and an officer on the bridge hailed the brig, inquiring if any serious damage was done.

The people aboard the New Era could not hear the response, but just as it was given an unexpected squall struck the sea, and the brig's weakened fore-mast went crashing by the board.

In a few moments, brig, steamer and boats were lost to view, in the gloom of the driving rack.

Trueman had hastily given his orders. The halliards were let go, almost by the run, and such of the canvas as was not blown in tatters from the yards, was speedily furled.

Under a close-reefed main-topsail and topmast staysail, the ship now rushed along through the foaming waters.

"That steamer saved us," remarked Will to Charley.

"Ay, the boats were close to us, and we would have been boarded but for the appearance of the steamer and the collision, before the squall struck us."

"The brig is so badly damaged that she'll not again venture to trouble us in a hurry, if she does at all," said Will.

"No. You now can see how well the ship behaves," said Charley, "that steam-pipe forward does not weigh her down."

As he spoke, a noise like the report of thunder was heard from the direction of the steam-chamber.

"Great God! What was that?" cried Captain Trueman.

The loud hiss and gurgle of water came up from forward, and the ship's head was seen to sheer and make a plunge, as if about to dive down into the depths.

"The steam-room trap has given way! Don't be too long, or we are gone!" howled the engineer, as he snatched a lantern and darted forward.

"This way, some of you!" roared the captain, running after Mr. Turnwall.

Will and Charley followed the two men into the steam-chamber.

An air-tight iron trap, which had closed an aperture leading down to the steam works below, had been burst open by the tremendous force of a sea.

The water spouting up at intervals through this opening, was rushing in a torrent to leeward and toward the hold.

"We are lost! We can do nothing!" cried the captain.

A smile passed over the pale visage of the engineer.

"It is only necessary to replace the iron plug and bar it!" he shouted. "Some one has been meddling here," he added. "Some person had removed the iron bar which kept the plug down, and that was what caused it to burst open. Here! help me get the plug back in its place," he continued, turning to several of the crew who had come into the steam-room.

Charley promptly helped him roll the plug, which weighed about sixty pounds, to the opening.

At that moment the ship plunged, and Charley, who had leaned over the hole, was pitched head foremost through the aperture into the midst of the intricate machinery below.

A cry of horror broke from Mr. Turnwall.

"He is lost!" shrieked the excited engineer. "My boy is lost!"

He seized the lantern and held it over the opening.

Will looked down and saw Charley, with his heels up, clinging to a steel rod.

The water, occasionally rushing up, must soon suffocate him, unless he could be rescued.

As quick as thought the lad seized the end of a coil of rope lying near and fastened it about his breast under the arms.

"What would you do? You will only sacrifice your own life!" cried the captain.

"Charley is my friend," answered the brave lad, "and I am willing to take a risk for his sake."

He quickly descended through the opening by means of some iron work which was visible just below the top.

A surging torrent of water nearly took away his breath, but he succeeded in grasping Charley by the back of the coat-collar and in raising him to an upright position.

Then the captain, seizing his son, and the engineer grasping Will, they managed, with the assistance of some of the crew, to raise both boys out of the opening.

The iron plug was replaced and carefully barred.

Charley was nearly unconscious, but a good rubbing and some brandy finally restored him.

Both he and his father warmly thanked the lad for his gallant rescue of the former.

"Count on me to do anything for you, after this," said Charley.

Meanwhile the pumps were being vigorously worked, for a perilous quantity of water had run into the hold.

Who it was that had removed the iron bar from it was never discovered, though the cabin-boy, a Kanaka, was suspected of having done so, from curiosity to see what was beneath the trap.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHIP ON WHEELS.

In a short time the squall passed away to leeward, leaving a good fair wind, before which the New Era made progress on her course.

At daylight the captain set the men to bending on new sails, in place of those which had been blown away.

The engineer rubbed his hands when at last his ship was under full sail.

She had good weather, with fair winds, for a number of days, and now Mr. Turnwall was often seen in the main-top, glass in hand.

One morning he called out to Will:

"Come up here, my young friend, and look through this glass. Your eyes are better than mine. I wan't you to tell me what you see."

Will promptly mounted to the top, and turning the glass in the indicated direction, he cried out:

"Land O'!"

"Ay, it is the coast, on the bay, Panama Bay!" shouted the engineer.

"Pile on—pile on everything, Captain Trueman!" he continued, addressing the skipper who was below also looking at the land through a spy-glass.

An hour later the engineer again turned to Will, who had by his request remained with him in the top, and again passing the glass to him said:

"Look now—look again, and tell me what you see."

"I see rocks and cliffs with dark lines which look like serpents extending toward them from a sort of pier projecting from the shore."

"Ay, it is the movable pier, and the serpent-like lines you see are the rails of the road which are at last laid. This is glorious! My great theory will soon be put into practice."

"Your theory, said Will, pricking up his ears, for he now believed that an explanation of Turnwall's mysterious intentions hinted at by his father was about to be made to him.

"Ay, for five long years have my agents been working to prepare the railroad, and, thank God, it is at last completed. I have spent millions upon this thing. Providence saw fit to endow me with an enormous fortune, inherited from two very wealthy relatives—mine owners—but much of it have I spent to carry out my great design."

"And what may that be?" inquired Will.

"Ah, my brave boy!" cried the engineer, making a movement, as if about to embrace him. "You will soon know, and I intend that both you and your father shall reap a handsome share of the profits!"

"You mean, sir, if we live through your experiment!" said Will, smiling.

At this the engineer raised both hands and laughed.

"Ha! ha! my lad!" he cried, "there is not the slightest danger. Now, look again, and tell me what you see."

Will pointed the glass and beheld a great smoke rising from among the cliffs. Then he saw something like a huge gallows, having a platform, upon which was a steam machine, advancing on wheels along a rail that branched off a little from the main one, also toward the shore.

He could now perceive that many human beings were collected on this shore.

Under full sail the ship continued to approach the bay.

By direction of the engineer, who had descended to the deck, the captain now hoisted certain signals, which were brought by Turnwall.

Then there was a puff of smoke from the cliff, and the report of a gun was heard.

"That is the signal agreed upon, to let me know that everything is ready—that all is right!" cried the engineer, joyfully.

As the ship drew still nearer the shore, the crew gazed in wonder at the huge derrick, with its wheel near the top, at the extended pier, with rails upon it, and at the crowd of laborers, all looking toward the craft.

The pier, which was about twenty feet long, where visible, had a slope, which probably carried more of it under the water.

Straight towards it was the ship headed, but when she was within about eight fathoms of it, the captain had every stitch of canvas, except the foresail, taken in.

He then ordered his son Will at the wheel.

"Keep her head on a bee line, my boy, with that mark," he said pointing to a red sheet-iron arrow attached to the top of a staff, near the water's edge, where the pier was submerged.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the boy.

He was a good steersman, and the ship slowly and steadily glided on before the light breeze which was blowing toward the half sunken pier.

When she was within forty feet of the arrow mark, a slight scraping sound could be heard.

"We are shoaling!" cried Will, in alarm to his father.

"No—no," cried the engineer, who stood near the speaker, we are not shoaling, but are slipping into the patent groove, which is my own invention, and which I see is working well."

"Is it not time now to anchor by the stern, sir?" inquired the captain.

"Yes, you can let go that grapping-anchor now hanging over the taffrail."

Thereupon, Trueman, having ordered the foresail clewed up, called some of the men aft to work the capstan 'round, so as to lower the anchor.

The anchor was gradually lowered and as the cable attached to the instrument tautened the ship was stopped—the fluke of the anchor having caught upon a chain on the woodwork of the bridge beneath the water.

"Was ever anything done more nicely?" cried Mr. Turnwall.

"Had there been a strong wind or a sea on, the thing would not have worked at all," said Trueman.

"No, but I would not have undertaken it, in that case—would have waited for favorable weather," was the reply.

"You can leave the wheel now, Will," said the captain to his son.

Meanwhile the engine on the hoisting derrick was working away with a loud bang and clatter.

Some laborers in a boat were conveying toward the submerged pier a chain, as it was being "paid out" over the groove of the iron wheel, which was going round and round in the upper part of the derrick.

Having arrived astern of the ship, they carefully lowered the chain, which had a hook attached to the end, into the water.

"All fast!" sang out one of the men.

Then the derrick-wheel was reversed, and, as it turned and the chain tautened, the crew of the ship, to their amazement, felt the vessel rising from the water.

Some of the Chinamen ran wildly to and fro in terror, and others of the crew seemed about to leap overboard.

But the loud voice of the engineer checked them.

"Stop, there—stop! It's all right! Everything is working like a clock. Don't be afraid."

"I never saw anything like this before," cried Will.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Charley. "You can see that the ship,

while the submerged part of the pier rises, is held fast in a stout iron frame."

Will perceived that this was the case.

The ship sat in the frame something like a bird in its nest.

It was the grating of her lower timbers against this frame that Will had heard when he thought she was shoaling.

"How high up are we going?" he asked.

"Not much higher. Only enough for this part of the pier to be even with the other."

"And what does it all mean?"

"You will see very soon."

Will now perceived that the chain leading from the end of that part of the pier which had been submerged was moving more slowly over the wheel in the upper part of the derrick.

Suddenly it stopped.

The whole length of the pier now presented an even surface, and there was the ship still seated, motionless in the iron frame, her keel about five feet above the flooring of this pier.

"Does that chain hold the whole weight of this part of the pier and of the ship?" inquired Will.

"No. There are iron pillars under and attached to the pier, so arranged that they straighten up on hinges as the pier is raised—the lower parts resting on the bottom. It is an ingenious contrivance planned by father."

As Charley spoke there issued from between the cliffs in the distance two hand-cars, not more than three feet in width.

And many laborers were on these cars—each of which contained two enormous iron-grooved wheels.

Most of these laborers, like the many others on shore, were natives of the isthmus, but there were among them a dozen stout fellows, with rolled up sleeves, who looked like German blacksmiths, and carried hammers, with other tools.

Each of the hand-cars was directed slowly along diverging rails under the round metal bars attached to the bottom of the ship and which projected about a foot beyond the vessel's lower edges.

The occupants of the cars avoided contact with these bars by stooping.

Presently the cars were stopped, and then with levers and other instruments, the iron wheels were raised by the laborers and were finally slipped, by means of holes in the centre of each, over the bars and secured something in the same manner as those of a steam-car.

A singular spectacle it now was—that ship with her tall masts and with two wheels on each side of her.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE WAY.

WILL had watched these preparations in the utmost surprise and with wide-opened eyes.

"For Heaven's sake, Charley, tell me what your father is going to do!"

"You will soon learn," answered the other.

Mr. Turnwall was now conversing with the captain and with two men, who, evidently like himself, were engineers.

These were his agents. They had just climbed aboard by means of a rope ladder which Turnwall had lowered to them.

"May I tell Will all about things now?" inquired Charley, after he had edged up to his father's side and listened for some time to what was said.

"Yes, you may as well. All the crew must be told in a few minutes."

Charley then returned to Will and said:

"Father's intention is to cross this isthmus by land with the ship on wheels!"

"What?" cried the startled boy. "Why, the isthmus at this part is at least fifty miles wide!"

"I know it. But father's railroad has been completed. It extends all the way across."

"A railroad across the isthmus! Can that be so, Charley?"

At that period the Panama Railroad for steam cars, from Aspinwall to Panama had no existence.

Therefore Will's surprise, even at this part of the statement of his friend, was natural enough.

"But how was the track laid? There are mountains between here and the opposite coast."

"For five years father has had his agents superintending the work. In the first place, after the usual preliminaries, he had a survey made of the difficult mountainous part of the country. This showed him that, by means of stout piles to hold up the truck-beams in the valleys, by blasting and otherwise cutting a gorge-way through stupendous cliffs in some places, and where there were hollows in the rocks, enlarging these into great tunnels, that the thing could be done, after a fashion, and it now has been done in that way."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the railroad has a gradual ascent to its highest point, and then gradually descends toward the other coast."

"It seems to me a half way perilous business."

"And so I think. At this very moment the two engineers there are expressing strong doubts about the affair, and trying to deter father from crossing the isthmus with the ship on wheels."

"They do not think he will succeed?"

"They have doubts about it, but father is confident he will."

"He never will!" said the other lad emphatically.

"I think as you do," answered his friend. "Hark!"

"What!" Mr. Turnwall was saying to the engineers in a loud voice,

"not make the undertaking after five years' labor and spending millions of money? Hah—hah! I tell you it shall be done, and I am confident I will succeed!"

A few minutes later the seaman workmen were called aboard, and the rest of the day was spent in fixing the steam machinery which was to turn the wheels.

Mr. Turnwall had contrived his engine so that it would work well, though not so as to move the ship very fast.

It was a plan of his own invention, and excited the admiration of the other engineers.

Nearly all night did Will and his father remain up, talking over the undertaking.

"I am almost certain we are doomed, but I have given a solemn promise to Mr. Turnwall to stick to him through good or bad, and I will not break my word," said the captain, "but you, Will, had better stay behind."

"No," the boy answered, "where you go, there I will go, too. Besides, even if the plan does not succeed, we may not be hurt."

"I don't know but that I should compel you to stay behind," answered his father.

But Will begged so hard to be permitted to go that the captain finally consented.

Next morning early Mr. Turnwall summoned before him all the crew and explained to them his intention of trying to cross the isthmus with the ship on wheels.

"You who do not want to go with me can leave," he said; "but to those who do go I will pay double wages."

Here was a great incentive to most of the crew.

"But s'pose, sir, ship fallees—what den?" inquired one of the Chinamen.

"She will not fall," asserted Mr. Turnwall. "Do you suppose I would risk my own life and that of my son if there were any danger?"

"Sure shipee keepee straight with much tallee mast? S'pose wind blowee hard?"

"The ship is well balanced. I have made my calculations. She will not blow over. Hah! my friend, just think of it! twenty-six dollars a month to you, instead of thirteen!"

"All rightee! me go!"

"Me go!" Me go!" shouted all the other Chinese, but some of the Kanakas shook their heads.

Six men in all preferred to leave the ship.

They went away with their bags over their shoulders to one of the sheds which had been erected for the convenience of the workmen on shore, and where Mr. Turnwall said they might stay until they could signal, and be picked up by some passing craft.

And now the engineer gave the order for lowering the ship to the track.

The frame in which she sat being so arranged that it could gradually be opened, the craft was carefully lowered until the wheels which were attached to her rested on the rails.

Then the stern anchor was hoisted, and the engineer with his assistants having got up steam the shriek of the whistle rang far along the shore, and every obstruction in the way was removed.

In a moment the wheel attached to the craft began to whirl, and away went the ship along the track toward the cliff, with her colors waving from the gaff.

Cheer upon cheer broke from the large throng of laborers upon the shore.

From the steam-room rose at the same time a wild exultant burst of laughter, and up came Mr. Turnwall, who had uttered that laugh, waving his arms wildly about his hand.

His two agents, who were aft with the captain, grasped his hands and congratulated him on the magnificent behavior of his ship on wheels.

"Yes! yes! At last! at last! my dreams are to be realized!" cried Turnwall.

"Ay, ay, now," said Captain Trueman. "Hang me if I would believe this, did not I see it with my own eyes?"

"Isn't it strange and grand, father?" cried Will to him, as he looked up at the tall masts and then at the hull gliding along the track.

"Yes, and Turnwall is at present putting her only at her most moderate rate of speed, my boy. It is wonderful! wonderful! And who'll believe such a yarn when I get home and tell it?"

"Remember," said Charley, coming up, "we are to reach New York in three months! She'll be launched on the other side—"

"Ah, if we ever get there," said the captain. "As yet we have only the commencement of this queerest v'yage of all my life, but, bless my eyes, if it don't seem to me as if we may be successful, after all!"

"I am beginning to think so, too," said Charley.

The vessel soon reached the gully between the cliffs.

Here Turnwall stopped the craft to take in coal, which was piled up under a shed, by the side of the track.

The Chinamen laughed gleefully, as they helped to shovel this coal into the main-hold, where a door in the bulkhead made it easy of access from the steam-room.

In a few hours the coal was all in.

Then Turnwall's two agents gravely took leave of their employer.

"For mercy's sake, be careful, sir!" Will heard one of them say. "The up-grade commences now! Lookout for the beams over the gaps! They may give way, sir, as we have warned you, though we have done our best to make them firm!"

But Mr. Turnwall answered:

"Providence is with me in this! I shall be successful!"

Then the engineer ran down into the steam-room, and the agents were scarcely clear of the ship when the whistle again sent forth its demoniacal shriek, a gun was fired from the top of the cliff, and away again went the New Era, speeding along the track, with the smoke from her pipe rolling about her lofty masts.

Will looked over the side at the wheels.

They seemed perfectly strong and worked easily, but as the ship sped on, even at a moderate rate of speed, he imagined there was a slight oscillating motion of the hull.

A loud roaring now broke upon his ears.

There was a dark cloud over the sun.

"We are having a gale," said the boy to Charley, who stood near.

"Yes, and do you notice that even here, between two cliffs, the ship feels it and rocks? What will it be when the gulch opens yonder?"

"By my life, Charley, I think the craft will then go over."

"Hadn't we better house topmasts?" roared Captain Trueman down the hatchway of the steam-room. "There's a gale, sir, and I fear we'll capsize when we reach the open."

"No, no! Clap on your canvas, captain, and increase our speed!" yelled Mr. Turnwall from below. "Clap on everything, I say!"

"But I tell you, sir, the ship won't stand it," responded Trueman.

"Yes, she will. She's too well balanced to tip over. Ho, ho! Away we go, bound for the Atlantic Ocean—for the Caribbean Sea!"

"Hooray, hooray, for Caribbean Sea!" yelled all the Chinamen.

The engineer had succeeded in increasing the vessel's speed a little, and in another moment she was in a valley beyond the gulch.

Then the hurricane—for hurricane the gale proved to be—had a pretty good sweep upon her.

She now rocked like a cradle.

Suddenly a loud snap was heard.

The after-wheel, on the larboard side, lifted from the truck.

A cry of horror escaped the two boys as the ship keeled.

"There we go!" shrieked Charley.

"Quick, Will! The lee-mizzen top-mast stays!" howled the captain, seizing an ax.

Will also picked up an ax. The two cut away the mizzen top-mast stays, the top-mast went over with a crash, and the ship was saved for the time.

CHAPTER VI.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

HEARING the crash, Turnwall came running up from the steam-room.

On learning what had happened his cheeks blanched and he clenched his teeth.

But his chagrin was only momentary,

"Remember it is a hurricane!" he cried. "Something we'll not have often. As a general thing you can clap on all sail. We'll need to while on the up grade."

"It would be better to house fore and maintop masts," said the captain.

"No, no! I say no!" almost shrieked the engineer.

The ship was still rocking like a cradle.

Soon, however, she entered another gulch.

Here wild, stupendous cliffs rose on all sides.

The projecting topsall yards of the main was in danger of striking a projecting rock ahead.

"Ay, there's a piece of neglect!" cried the captain. "Please to slow up, Mr. Turnwall, or the stu'nail boom mast will be carried away, and the ship probably twisted from the track."

He had spoken to the empty air. Turnwall had run down into the steam-room.

The captain seizing an ax, and calling on his mates to help him, darted up the main rigging.

Knowing that he meant to cut away the boom his two mates followed to assist him.

The three reached the yard, but ere the spar could be quite cut asunder it struck the rock, snapped in two and was whirled away, knocking the three men off the footrope.

A cry escaped Will as he saw his father with a turn of the severed downhaul twisted about his form whipped out of his sight in a moment.

The other two men also disappeared, the whole three having fallen into a chasm under the projecting rock at the base of the cliff.

One horrible simultaneous shriek had been heard from the men as they fell, but nothing more.

As soon as possible the engine was reversed by Turnwall, whom Charley had quickly informed of the dreadful occurrence.

The ship was slowly back alongside the chasm, on one side of which hung thick shrubbery and trailing vines, at present nearly obscured by a thick fog cloud which had rolled down the side of the mountain.

Nevertheless the ship's occupants could from their elevated position on the deck, look down to the bottom of the chasm, which was not there obscured.

Then an exclamation of horror broke from all the spectators.

Impaled upon sharp rocks, they beheld the confused mass of human remains, so torn and crushed to pieces as to be beyond recognition.

Will ran down into the cabin to give way to his grief.

Charley followed him.

Then the ship was heard driving ahead again on its way along the track.

At length it stopped.

The hurricane had torn some trees by the roots from an elevation and they had fallen across the track:

They must be cleared away ere the wheeled ship could proceed.

The Chinamen and others composing the crew were soon busy with their axes.

Meanwhile Mr. Turnwall had descended into the cabin and joined his efforts to those of his son at consoling the bereaved boy who had just lost his father.

But Will for the present was inconsolable.

He sat with bowed head, and sob after sob convulsed his frame.

"Come, my young friend," cried Turnwall. "Cheer up. Such things will happen in this world. Remember that your father could not have suffered. His death must have been instantaneous. Then, again, try and turn your thoughts upon this glorious undertaking—this carrying out of my grand theory which must astonish the whole world."

The engineer's eyes gleamed wildly as he spoke.

His pale face seemed to bear an almost unearthly expression.

"No! no!" cried Will. "It was this that killed my father! How can I take further interest in it for that reason?"

"Yes! yes you will! Everyone must be interested in my—"

"Hush, father! Please say no more about that now!" cried Charley.

"But what can I say to him better calculated to cheer him?"

Charley took his father's arm and led him to one side.

"Say nothing. Leave everything to me," he remarked, in a low voice.

The engineer left the cabin.

Charley sighed, for he feared that his father's mania about his ship on wheels had really upset his reason.

"Do you know, Charley," said Will, suddenly looking up with a hopeful expression on his face, "that it seems to me my father cannot be dead after all. It does not seem possible that he can have been so suddenly taken from me!"

"Is he too going mad?" reflected Charley, gazing at the wild face of his friend.

But Will continued:

"The chasm cannot be far from this. I only got a brief look into it. I am going to look again."

"No—no," said Charley, much pained. "I don't see how there can be any doubt about his being dead. I am sorry to say it—but how could there be?"

"Strange things sometimes happen," cried Will. "I remember now that there was the rope—the down-haul—caught about his breast and attached to a fragment of the boom as he went flying through the air."

"And you think—"

"That possibly the piece of boom might have caught against some rocky projection and held him. Remember there was a thick mist and a great mass dangling vines on one side of the chasm, and if held by the rope my father might have escaped our notice."

"I don't think so."

"I am going to make sure."

"Well, then, we will go together—we will go for the sake of satisfying you."

The two boys, as soon as Charley had made their intention known to Mr. Turnwall, descended from the now stationary ship and walked rapidly in the direction of the chasm.

On reaching the edge of the cavity they looked down into it—examined it on all sides.

At the bottom they again saw the confused mass of mangled human remains.

Charley shuddered, and Will gave a cry of anguish.

But suddenly he pointed to a rope and to a piece of broken spar, to which it was attached.

The spar was almost hidden by a projecting raised slab of rock, near the pit, under which it was firmly wedged, and there was the rope irregularly coiled beside it.

"How came that rope coiled?" almost shrieked Will. "Some one must have done it!"

"Hark!" said Charley. "I thought I heard a faint voice."

Will heard it, too, and ran in the direction of the sound.

Then, in a hollow, among the rocks, the boy saw his father reclining.

His face was badly bruised, and he pointed to his leg, as if to imply that it was broken.

"Oh, father! you are badly hurt!" cried Will, putting his arms around him.

"I don't think my leg is quite broken," faintly answered the captain. "I can almost walk. I contrived to draw myself up, out of the pit. But my mates are lost."

"Yes," said Charley. "This is almost a miracle. How were you saved, sir?"

"Well, after all, I did not fall very far, not more than thirty feet. Had my body struck the rock it would have killed me, but I went into the pit, and as I went, my form hitting the thick branches of the scrubbery and vines hanging into it, the force of my fall was a little broken. Six feet below the top of the chasm, the rope which was about my breast tautened, held above by the broken spar, which had become jammed in the crevice under the rocky slab."

"There I hung for some moments, so badly shaken up that I knew nothing."

"I was revived by a sharp twinge in my right leg, and then knew that the limb must have slantingly struck the edge of the pit when I fell into it. I managed to climb out of the chasm by the rope, and

slipping it from me, I contrived to crawl to this hollow, but I could go no further.

"I heard the ship when she was backed to the side of the pit.

"I called, but so faintly that no one heard me.

"Then, when I saw the tall masts gliding through the air away from me, I gave myself up for lost."

The two boys managed to get the captain out of the hollow.

Will then went out to the middle of the track, and with his kerchief made signals.

Finally some of the men came up, and between them the captain was taken to the vessel.

He was laid in his berth, and Gorlona, the steward, a half-breed Carib Indian, who had been famous as a doctor among his tribe, made an examination of the limb, which he said was not broken.

It would, however, be some days ere the skipper could return to duty.

"Will is a good sailor," said the captain, "and since my mates are lost he will have to take charge of the ship's affairs in my place."

Thus it came about that this boy of only sixteen suddenly found himself in command of the strange ship on wheels.

CHAPTER VII.

ENEMIES.

"THE trees are cleared away and the hurricane is about over," said Turnwall to Will, when he stepped on deck from the cabin. "Pile on the canvas, my young friend."

"It will be best to first get up a new mizzen topmast in place of the one which was cut away by father and me."

"Very well; be as quick as you can. Remember we are bound for the Atlantic Ocean, and I want to reach it as soon as I can."

Then he descended into the steam room, and, a moment later, the wheels of the ship began to go round, and once more the stately vessel was sweeping along the railroad track.

Before night Will had got up another mizzen topmast.

Turnwall then directed him to make sail.

But, just as the boy was going to give his orders, a tremendous crash was heard ahead, and a great rock was seen rolling down from the summit of a lofty elevation!

"Stop the ship!" shrieked Will and Charley, simultaneously.

As they spoke the rock rolled upon the track, where it lay, directly ahead of the ship.

Turnwall reversed his engine, and the ship, which, as usual, had been going at a moderate rate of speed, was stopped just in time to escape striking the rock.

"What made rockee fall?" inquired one of the Chinese sailors.

"I suppose it got loose from the top of the height," said Mr. Turnwall.

"No, father," responded Charley, "I am sure it did not. I was looking at the top of the cliff, and the first thing I knew, the rock came rolling over the edge of it."

"Are you sure?"

"Ay, ay, I was watching the cliff, too," said Will, "and it happened just as Charley says."

"No, no, boys, you must be mistaken. How could the rock roll over the edge of itself?"

"It did roll over, sir," said Will.

"Then," said Turnwall, "human hands must have shoved it over."

The three looked at each other for some moments, in silence.

"This ought to be seen to," said Will. "I will arm myself and climb to the top of that cliff."

"And I, too!" cried Charley.

"The rascals, whoever they are, will run at sight of you, but you better take some of the Chinese with you?" cried the engineer.

Will and Charley, each with a revolver, were soon scaling the side of the cliff, followed by four of the Chinamen, armed with cutlasses.

The cliff was a pretty steep one, but there were protuberances, here and there, to assist the climbers.

On reaching the summit where they were soon joined by the Chinese, the boys looked around them.

Confused masses of rocks were on every hand.

The party saw no human being, save themselves, though they made a careful search.

Then Will looked towards the sea.

He was surprised at the little progress the ship had made, for the bay was not more than ten miles off.

But, when he noticed the descending line of the track and its winding course, he no longer wondered.

The up-grade had been even steeper than he had thought, and the speed of the vessel had been kept slow.

"What is that?" said Charley, pointing out a dark object in one of the bays of the coast.

"Hello!" cried Will, as he unslung the spy-glass from his shoulders and looked through it. "As I live, it is the Spanish brig which pursued us while we were at sea!"

"I wonder how long she has been there?" said Charley.

"She may have been there several days," said Will, "without being noticed, as she is in a deep bay and nearly walled in by cliffs. The opening between them enables us to see her from this lofty height."

At that moment the Chinamen who had been looking among the rocks, along the edge of the cliff, some yards off, came running toward the friends.

The sharp report of pistols suddenly rang, and one of the party fell headlong down the cliff—a bullet having penetrated his heart.

"Help—quick! We all be shot!" cried one of the sailors to Will.

"Follow me!" cried the boy. "Where are they?"

The men pointed toward a hollow rock, not far off, about which the smoke was still curling.

Will and Charley, with cocked revolvers, ran toward the rock.

All at once, as the boys were passing another rock, a gleaming cutlass, with a sweeping side movement, was aimed for Will's neck.

But Charley saw it in time to send a bullet from his revolver through the arm that wielded the weapon.

There was a yell, as the cutlass was dropped, and a sailor, wearing the dress of a man-of-war's-man, was seen running away, dodging among the rocks. Two of the men, similarly attired, now sprang from the hollow and ran.

Will and Charley fired at them, but the fugitives were soon out of sight among the rocks which had shielded them from the shots.

"We know now who rolled the rock down upon the track," said Will, as, with his party, he descended the cliff to return to the ship. "Those fellows were from the Spanish armed brig, as was proved by their dress."

"Yes," answered Charley, "and they have probably strayed from a larger party. We will have more trouble with those people."

"Ay, I fear they will do all they can to destroy the ship and all aboard."

"I think so. Because father offended them by the part he took in the revolution, they are willing, in order to kill or capture him, to destroy us all."

When the boys reached the ship, and Mr. Turnwall heard their report, he was much excited.

"We must keep a good watch all the time," he said. "I saw that poor Chinaman come rolling down the cliff, after he was shot. It was a horrible sight. But I will triumph yet," he cried. "Nothing of this kind shall deter me from carrying out of my great plan."

Already he had men engaged in knocking the rock ahead to pieces with hammers and crowbars.

In a short time it was removed from the track, and the ship proceeded on her way.

"Set all sail!" cried the engineer, "the up-grade is now steeper than ever, and we must do everything to add to our speed."

Will gave the necessary orders, and under topsails, to' galla'n't sails and royals, the ship presented a strange and novel sight as she glided along the track on wheels.

A strong, fair wind now blowing, helped the vessel on her way.

"In time I hope to perfect my machinery so as to attain nearly the speed of a steam-car," Turnwall remarked to Will. "I only wish we could go fast enough to balk my enemies by leaving them far behind."

"We do not go very fast at present," said the boy.

"No; and on account of the many windings of the road and the up-grade, I doubt if we are as yet more than fifteen miles from the Pacific coast."

Soon Will and Charley were keeping a keen lookout about them.

All at once the former pointed out the broken walls of a ruined Spanish fort upon a beetling cliff, which the ship would soon pass.

"I see a cannon there, aimed downward," he said. "It will command the ship."

"Yes, but it must be an old gun. I don't believe any one could fire it off."

"I am not so sure of that. I've heard father say that some of those old pieces are in a remarkably good state of preservation."

"Well, it isn't likely there's any one there to make use of it."

"I'm not so sure of that. I fancied just now, that I saw the head of a man for an instant protruding above the wall upon which the gun rests. Better tell your father about it."

Charley went to the hatchway of the steam-room near which his father still stood.

"Nonsense!" cried Mr. Turnwall, when his son spoke of the gun.

"It is not likely anyone has loaded that old piece. How could it be done?"

"I would caution you to be careful, sir," said Will. "Some of those old pieces are in pretty good order. A party from the gun-brig with ammunition could do you much mischief with that gun."

"How could they get the ammunition there?"

"Easily," cried Charley. "They could engage the muleteers, who are all the time traversing these mountains, to carry it for them."

"I don't believe there's anyone there. The ship is now going beautifully, and I will not stop her."

On went the ship with Charley and Will looking a little uneasily toward the gun.

The sails were drawing splendidly, the wheels went round with scarcely a creak, and the tall masts flung their shadows on one side of the stupendous cliffs between which the craft was gliding.

Will, thinking he might get a glimpse over the ruined rock wall, if he climbed to the main to 'gallant cross-trees, ran aloft.

Scarcely had he passed the top-sail when crack! crack! crack! went three pistols, the shots just missing the lad!

"There they are—I see them!" shouted the boy. "Quick! sir! stop the ship! They are going to fire the gun at her!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SHIP'S PERIL.

MR TURNWALL passed the word to his assistants to stop the craft.

They obeyed his order, but it was plain that the vessel's headway could not now be checked in time.

Directly under the fort wall was she carried.

The Chinamen sprang over the rail and crouched down on the outside of the ship.

At the same moment there was a broad flash, and with a tremendous roar, the gun was discharged.

The piece exploded at once, but its contents, consisting of fragments of old iron, flew all about the ship, making holes in some of the canvas and cutting chips from the masts and the sails.

Not a person aboard the vessel was hit, but a shriek of agony from among the sailors behind the wall indicated that some of them had been badly hurt.

Will, from his elevated position, saw, as the pieces of iron went buzzing about him, several forms writhing in mortal agony on a broken angle of the stone work.

"Again," cried Mr. Turnwall, "again has Providence seen fit to assist me in my great design."

He ran down into the steam-room, and the wheels of the ship spun round as he increased her speed.

Some pistol shots were fired after her from the wall, but these only lodged in the hull of the craft.

Mr. Turnwall came on deck when the old ruin had been left far behind.

Will had descended from aloft, and he and Charley now were gazing ahead, where the rail-timbers were laid over a broad, deep chasm, about forty feet in width.

The timbers had been strengthened by cross-bars of iron, set in deep cuttings in the wall of the cliff, on both sides.

Mr. Turnwall now showed some uneasiness.

Will noticing this, run aloft to the main masthead, and though he could not see to the bottom of the chasm, as it was so far off he knew that it was a dreadful one to run any risk in crossing!

"How deep is that chasm, sir?" he asked of the engineer after he had slid to the deck, by means of a backstay.

"Three hundred feet," answered Turnwall.

"A frightful distance to fall!" cried the boy. "Are you sure there is no danger?"

"Well, of course the weight of the ship will be very trying to those cross-bars but I can feel quite sure that no such ending of my great plan is likely to happen!"

"Remember, sir," cried Will, "that my father lies helpless below, and, in case of any accident, could do nothing for himself."

"My dear boy, pretty soon you must clasp on all sail—clap on more canvas. It is best to pass over that chasm as rapidly as we can, though I think there is no danger."

Will ran down into the cabin, and made his way to his father's berth.

He found his parent doing well under the skillful treatment he had received at Gorlona's hands."

"Father," said the boy, "we are approaching a deep, perilous chasm, crossed by the railroad. Mr. Turnwall wants to me to set more canvas, that it may be more rapidly crossed.

"I am afraid the railroad ties will give way, and that the ship will be precipitated into the abyss. Had not you, as you are helpless, better leave the craft?"

"No, boy," answered the captain decidedly. "You can do so if you wish, but I have promised to stand by the engineer through everything—through every danger, and I must keep my word. As you are acting for me, Will, you must obey his every order."

"Be it so, then," answered the boy. "As to my leaving the craft while you are aboard, I could not bring myself to do so."

He then went on deck and gave orders for the setting of fore and maintop-mast and stunsails.

The crew promptly obeyed, and now, under her cloud of canvas, the ship before the fair wind made additional progress.

On she went, sweeping every moment nearer to the chasm.

At last she reached it, and the next moment her wheels with a rumbling sound like thunder were passing over the tracks on the perilous timbers.

Shuddering, Will and Charley gazed over the ship's side far down into the depths of the gloomy ravine.

From its sides projected some vines and masses of shrubbery growing from crevices in the rugged walls.

At the bottom were sharp, flinty rocks, by which the ship, should she fall upon them, would be dashed to many fragments.

"It seems to me we are not going as fast as we were," said Charley just as the ship's stern was over the commencement of the chasm.

"No, our speed is slackened for some reason or other," cried Will, anxiously. "Hark! did you hear that?"

An ominous cracking sound was in fact now heard along the length of the timbers.

"Good Heaven! I believe the weight of the ship is already straining the timbers so as to loosen the iron supports under them across the chasm!" cried Charley.

Will ran his eyes along the iron bars.

Then he gave a cry of horror as he pointed to one which had been loosened by the giving way of the rock about the opening in which it was fixed.

A moment later the ship's speed was slackened still more.

The steam machinery had been stopped, and only her sails now shoved her along at a very slow pace.

"What is the matter, father?" called out Charley, running to the hatchway of the steam-room.

Creak, creak, creak, crack, went the strained timbers at the same instant.

"It is nothing, only something a little out of order, which I will soon remedy," answered the engineer.

And now, as the weight of the ship remained so long on the rail timbers, a clanging sound was heard.

The iron support which had been loosened in the wall slipped out of the hole, as more of the rock gave way and went clattering down to the bottom of the ravine.

This was followed by the giving way of another one of the bars, in the same manner, which also rattled down to the bottom of the chasm.

The crew now ran hither and thither in extreme terror.

The cracking of the timbers, which were fairly bending under the weight of the ship, became louder.

Will pointed out to Charley a rent in one of the timbers, as if it was being split by a wedge.

But now a dense black smoke issued from the steam-pipe, and the clatter of the works was again heard.

The wheels revolved faster, and the craft, under steam and canvas, continued on her way across the frightful chasm.

The two boys fairly held their breath.

Crack! crack! crack! went the timbers, bending still more.

"We'll get safely across after all!" cried Charley, as the bow wheels of the vessel rested on the other side of the ravine.

"I hope so, but—"

He was interrupted by a loud crash.

Half of the ship was now over the chasm, but one of the rail timbers seemed about to give way.

"Quick, father, quick, for your life!" yelled Charley.

There was another loud crash, followed by a cry of horror and dismay from the crew.

The timber had broken off in the middle, and the two jagged ends, with the track above them bending inward, slanted toward the bottom of the ravine.

The stern of the ship made a slight descent as the wheel on the bent rail followed the curve, and the hull tilted so that the opposite wheel was lifted from the track.

"We are lost!" shrieked Charley.

"Ay, it's all up with us!" shouted Will.

The ship was still gliding on, but a frightful picture did she present heeling so far over under her cloud of canvas that her topsail yards pointed diagonally toward the opposite side of the abyss.

For a moment it seemed as if she must go—must fall sternways into the depths of that terrible chasm.

The crew, springing to the bows, were about to leap from that part of the vessel into a deep, perilous gulley on each side of the track, where they would have been dreadfully maimed if not killed, when Will's clear, ringing voice was heard.

"Avast there! don't jump, men, don't jump! See! she rights! she rights! We will pass safely over!"

In fact, as Turnwall worked his engine to its full capacity, the wheel in the curve of the bending track was drawn after the others, and half of the vessel's length now being over the opposite extremity of the chasm, the lessening of her weight upon the broken timber brought her again to an upright position.

Will's timely cry stopped the men from making their perilous leap.

A moment later the ship had passed over the chasm and was safe on the firm rails beyond.

But no cheer or shout was heard, for there was not one person aboard that craft, who looking back at the broken timber did not turn cold at his narrow escape from a terrible doom!

CHAPTER IX.

THE ATTACK.

UP came Mr. Turnwall, looking as pale as a ghost.

At length he cried out: "Who will not say that there is a providence in this thing—that I am not being thus helped along in my grand scheme, which is to prove so great a benefit to mankind?"

"I hope we will have no more such places to cross," said Charley.

"That is the only place exactly of that kind," answered Mr. Turnwall, joyously. "The grade, for awhile will be downward, and consequently we shall make swifter progress very soon. Will," he added, turning to the captain's son, "you can take in sail for it is nearly dusk, and I am too careful to proceed on my way at night."

As the shadows of the closing day deepened, Will gave the necessary orders for taking in sail, and soon the ship was under bare poles.

At dark Turnwall shut off his engine.

A good watch was posted about the craft, and the boys, with the engineer, went down to supper in the cabin.

So zealous was Will in the performance of his duties, that after he had talked with his father and finally seen him drop to sleep, he resolved, though very tired, to stay on deck for a few hours ere turning in.

When he reached the deck he found the night very dark.

The huge, beetling cliffs of the mountains on each side of the ship served to deepen the gloom.

Having made sure that the men on watch were keeping a good lookout, the boy walked to and fro along the deck for a couple of hours.

He was about to go below, when he felt some one touch his arm.

He turned, and in the gloom recognized Gorlona, the steward.

The Indian said to him in a low voice:

"You have fire-arms plenty?"

"We have a supply in the cabin."

"Then get them up as quick as you can and give them to all the crew."

"Why?"

"The gun-brig people are near."

"How do you know?" cried the startled boy.

"I can hear them up there," answered the half-breed, pointing toward the dim outline of the cliff wall.

"I have been looking all about the cliff and have seen nothing," said Will.

"Sharp ears are better than eyes in the dark," said Gorlona.

"What do you hear?"

"Hark. Hear you nothing?"

Will listened.

"I hear nothing save the click—click of a beetle or some insect of that kind."

"No, it is not the beetle you hear. Few of them will you find so high up. What you hear is the click of a chisel, away up on top of the mountain."

"A chisel?"

"Yes. I think so, but am not sure. The men are at work, but what they are doing I know not."

"Can you form no idea?"

"No, I cannot."

"I will go and see."

"I will go. It were better you should stay here and prepare the crew to fight. When you hear me make the cry of the heron, you may know I have seen something, and that there is danger. Then it will be time to arm the crew."

"Will you not run the risk of capture?"

"No. Too often have I scaled crags of my native shores to fear that. I know how to dodge in and out among the rocks, so that I will not be seen."

So saying the speaker lowered the rope-ladder, which was always kept ready on deck and, descending the ship's side, was soon climbing the rocky walls of the stupendous height which here towered far above the masts of the ship.

Will soon lost sight of him in the gloom.

All at once, afar off, as if up among the clouds, he heard a shrill scream.

It was the cry of the bird—of the heron, which was the signal of danger.

Presently he could see the dim form of Gorlona, as he came rapidly down the cliff.

Will at once awoke Mr. Turnwall, telling him there was danger, and that it was best to arm the crew.

"No—no," said Turnwall. "Better get up steam and put the ship on its way! I will risk no fighting, if I can help it, as I cannot afford to lose any of my crew, who are few enough now."

Charley having also been awakened, went on deck with Will, both boys being armed with revolvers. Will, looking again toward the cliff, saw Gorlona quicken his movements.

All at once, he could be indistinctly seen running out on the trunk of a tree projecting almost horizontally from the mountain side.

A stout branch of this tree was within a foot of the end of the ship's maintopsail-yard.

Reaching this branch, the half-breed flung himself upon the yard and proceeded to creep inboard along the foot rope. A minute later he had descended the rigging and was with the boys on deck.

"You are not hurt?" said Will.

"No. There are about thirty-five men or so, on top of that mountain. They are from the gun brig and are all armed. Have you got the crew ready?"

"No. Turnwall does not want to fight. He is in the steam-room and is going to get up steam. He thinks it best to do this as he does not want to risk losing any of his men."

"He will not have time before the explosion. Those men have made a large opening under a great rock on the edge of the mountain, and have filled it with a charge of powder. Before I descended the cliff they were about to light a fuse. You may know what is going to take place. There will be an explosion, which if it does not disable the ship so that she cannot be kept on her way, will scatter the rocks all over the track, so as to block her course."

Even as Gorlona spoke there was a noise like the bursting of many thunderbolts.

A broad flash lighted the gloom, and, in that gleam, great masses of rock could be seen descending through the air toward and all around the ship.

Down came many of these great pieces of rock, and, two of them falling upon the ship, within three feet of the boys, went crashing through the deck into the hold.

At the same moment there was a cry of horror from some of the watch forward.

Will, snatching a lantern from the inside of the companionway, ran toward the bow.

There a fearful spectacle met his gaze.

A great rock had fallen directly upon the head of one of the Chinamen, who had been keeping a lookout there, and knocking him from the ship, had crushed him flat to the ground.

Falling from so tremendous a height, the huge mass, which must have weighed nearly a quarter of a ton, had left visible but little more than the hands and feet of the poor fellow.

Will turned away, shuddering while running to the steam room hatchway. Charley shouted out to his father:

"Steam can do as no good now. The track is blocked."

Up came Mr. Turnwall, looking very pale.

"Arm the crew," he said, "and get ready the 'coffee-mill.' I see we will have to fight."

In fact, the cries of the sailors now could be heard as they came down the side of the mountain.

Such of the ship's crew as had been below had swarmed on deck.

"There are but twelve of us for fighting," said Charley, "but, if we load and fire rapidly, we may keep those rascals at bay."

Mr. Turnwall, the steward and the Kanaka cabin boy brought up the muskets and ammunition.

A couple of lanterns were lighted, as the party could not very well see to load and fire in the dark.

The lighting of the lantern was greeted with a pistol volley from among the rocks and hollows in the side of the mountain.

But none of the ship's occupants, who were screened by the bulwarks and the masts and the cabin-house, were hit.

Thicker and faster came the shots from the mountain side.

But the ship's crew kept themselves screened by the masts and rails, so that not one was struck.

Suddenly Gorlona pointed out a number of dark forms, gathered near the base of the tree projecting out toward the main-topsail yard.

"They mean to try to board us in that way," he said, "as, owing to the height of the ship's hull from the ground, they could not climb the vessel's side without ladders."

"That is true. The fore-main and mizzen-chains are too high up for them to reach," said Turnwall.

Will procured a short broad-ax, and thrust it into his belt.

Then he sprang toward the main-rigging.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Charley.

"To cut away that part of the branch within reach of the end of the yard," answered the boy.

"It will be risky work," said Mr. Turnwall.

"There is no alternative," responded Will. "The foe will be aboard of us soon, if the branch is not severed!"

He sprang into the rigging as he spoke.

Crack! crack! whiz-z! whiz-z! Bang! bang! went pistols and bullets as Will's active form ascended the rigging.

It was only the darkness that hindered his being shot down at once.

CHAPTER X.

FRIGHTFUL PERIL AHEAD.

"We must do all we can to protect that brave boy!" cried Mr. Turnwall. "Here, Charley, help me right this 'coffee-mill'!"

But Charley, who had a cartridge-box and caps, belted to his waist and a musket slung over his back was mounting the rigging after his friend.

Gorlona helped sight the "coffee-mill."

Its numerous barrels were pointed toward the gang by the tree, and the rapid "pop-pop" of the machine was soon heard.

Some of the enemy were shot, but they presently contrived to keep out of range, and now many nimble forms were seen crawling along the trunk of the tree.

The position of the instrument was then changed, and now and then a form was seen twisting and squirming, in the death agony, on the trunk, ere it dropped to the ground below.

Meanwhile Will had reached the end of the yard, and, sitting astraddle of it, his blows fell rapidly upon the branch of the tree.

Standing upon the yard by the mast, Charley, as fast as he could, kept firing at the foe, over his friend's head—occasionally shooting down one of the gang.

Many a shot was discharged at the two boys by the brig's sailors, but Charley, owing to his position, had the advantage.

His enemies were obliged to fire at right-angles, for fear of hitting their own men upon the tree.

At last, with a crash away went the branch before the vigorously applied blows of the broad-axe.

Thus the foe were prevented from boarding the ship, in that direction.

Then Will and Charley descended to the deck.

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Turnwall.

As he said this, the sailors were seen rapidly descending the side of the mountain.

Evidently they intended to make an effort to board the ship from that direction, by means of ropes, with hooks attached to the ends.

Livid flashes of lightning from heavy black clouds, which had drifted over the sky, and seemed to bode a terrific storm, now and then revealed their forms.

Meanwhile streaks of flame spurted frequently over the bulwarks of the ship, as the "coffee-mill" continued to "grind out" its deadly missiles.

Now and then the ringing voice of Will Trueman was also heard, as he gave the order to the crew to fire.

With the barrels of their muskets resting on the rail, they discharged volley after volley at the dark forms dodging in and out among the rocks and trees, in their efforts to get out of range.

Suddenly a tremendous roar and prolonged, howling shriek was heard.

It was the rush of the hurricane from the black, cavernous clouds.

There was thunder and lightning.

The rain descended in a perfect deluge, and the water ran in streams from every shelving rock.

Trees were torn from the roots and rolled crashing down the side of the mountain.

The brig's men were obliged to flee for their lives to seek a place of shelter.

"We should call this 'Hurricane Coast,'" said Will, as he shook the water from his drenched garments.

"Yes," said Charley, "and it has scattered our foes so that we will not see them in a hurry."

"And does not this again look like an interposition of Providence," cried Mr. Turnwall with gleaming eyes, "to thwart my enemies, that I may carry out my great scheme of crossing the isthmus in a ship on wheels?"

"It does look so," said Charley, in order to humor him.

"The wind is from the north," said Will, "so that being away down between the two opposite cliffs of the mountain we do not feel the blast where we are."

"And the trees sent down the mountain do not reach the ship. They have a slanting direction along the cliff," cried Charley.

"And many of them adhere to hollows in the rocks. This forms a sort of barrier which the brig's people will find it difficult to pass," rejoined the engineer, rubbing his hands. "It is a good time to remove the rocks from the track ahead. The running water from the mountain will not interfere, as it follows the incline of the hollow on each side of the road."

The crew, provided with lanterns, were sent to remove the fragments of rocks.

They worked steadily, and by midnight every obstruction had been displaced.

Then Turnwall, as soon as his weary, drenched men were on board, got up steam and proceeded several miles further on his way.

With the exception of two lookouts—the ship now having been stopped—the crew all turned in.

They were soon in a deep sleep, from which none, save those who were to relieve the watch, were aroused until late the next morning.

On reaching the deck, after their sound and refreshing slumber, and after a good breakfast Will and Charley perceived that the hurricane was still raging, though the rain now had ceased to fall.

"We will have more, as this is August—one of the rainy seasons here," remarked Charley.

"The cataracts I see ahead look as if their waters increased," remarked Will.

"Yes," said Charley, "and see how the spray flies before the force of the hurricane."

"Ay, and I suppose the continuation of that track runs along that lofty, rocky ridge, that seems to have the cataracts on each side of it."

"Yes, that ridge rises over two hundred feet above them."

"It looks dangerous in some places. The openings in it near the top seem to have great fissures above them, as if the roofs might give way at any moment."

"Ay, it will be a perilous place for us to cross—especially as it is exposed to the full fury of the hurricane!"

Will went up to Mr. Turnwall, who now emerged from the cabin.

"We had better house topmasts, sir," he said.

"Why?"

"Because if we do not we may be blown over into those cataracts 200 feet below!"

"No danger—no danger. The wind has changed so that it will be partly astern. You had better set whole top-sails."

Will knew that in such a gale this was the last thing that should be done.

"The wind is not enough astern to prevent its heaving us over," he said.

"I will risk it," firmly answered Mr. Turnwall. "That ledge is two miles long, and as it is a perilous one, I would cross it as soon as possible. The openings in the rock under the track might give way—that is the roofs might cave in if we went too slow."

Will's father had told him to implicitly obey the orders of the engineer, whom he now really believed to be quite mad.

He had the topsails set, but he feared it would result in the destruction of the craft.

There was, however, a bare chance of the wind's hauling further aft by the time the ship should reach the end of the mountain ravine where the dangerous ridge commenced.

Turnwall now went to the steam-room with his two assistants, who had just come up from the steerage.

A few moments later the buzz of the machinery was heard, and the smoke rolled up from the pipe as the ship glided along the track.

She was soon out of the ravine upon the ridge.

The wind had fortunately hauled further aft, and the vessel, as her canvas added its force to that of the steam, made good progress.

But she rocked now and then in a way that made all hands uneasy.

So narrow was the ridge that her hull was on a line with its edges.

Looking over the rail, the boys watched the white, roaring waters of the cataracts so far beneath them.

At last they breathed freely.

The vessel had passed over nearly the full length of the ridge without any of the rocky roofs of the openings giving way.

The craft now glided along a mountain gorge, at the end of which the road curved.

To meet this curve Will braced the yards.

The ship went round the curve on her spinning wheels, and she now was over a ravine nearly 500 feet long, bordered by the beams of the track, which were here supported on niches of the perpendicular walls of rock, rising from the sides of the abyss, and secured by iron bars for ties.

"Halloo! What means that great mist ahead of us?" cried Charley.
"It looks more like smoke than mist," said Will. "Ay, it is smoke!"
"It is not fifty fathoms ahead," said Charley.

Mr. Turnwall being called, quickly came up:

"The Lord help us!" he cried. "The bridge over the deepest part of the chasm we have yet crossed has been struck by lightning, and set on fire!"

Will ran aloft to the maintop-gallant cross-trees, and took a keen look ahead.

"The bridge is gone!" he shrieked in dismay.

Charley bounded to the hatchway of the steam-room and repeated the direful news to his father, who was now below stopping the works.

Presently he reappeared on deck with his assistants as pale as death.

"Let go topsail halyards and clew up!" shouted Will.

This was done, and the speed of the craft was slackened.

But it seemed as if nothing could now save the ship from soon plunging down the gap left by the destruction of the bridge.

As she drew nearer to it Will's voice was again heard.

"Great Heaven! there is a roaring sea of fire in the chasm!"

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE TRACK OF DOOM.

"Oh, father, can nothing be done to prevent the ship's plunging into the fiery chasm?" cried Charley.

"No, it is too late. We are doomed!" answered Mr. Turnwall, in despair.

"I know the meaning of that fire," said Gorlona. "In some of the deep chasms there are carbon and sulphur, the first escaping from holes in the rocks. The bridge, fired by the lightning, when it fell set fire to these."

The coolness of the half Indian was in singular contrast with the excitement of the crew.

The Chinese were running hither and thither, looking over the sides of the ship as if for some way to leave her ere she should make the fatal plunge.

But there was no way to save themselves by leaving the craft.

Her speed as yet was but little slackened.

Were they to attempt to drop upon the narrow ties, which were wide apart, they would only fall into the frightful depth of the ravine below.

There would be no chance of their obtaining a hold of any of the iron bars.

"My God, this is terrible!" cried the engineer.

"We all have to die, and can die but once," said Gorlona. "Quick will be our death in those raging flames."

Nearer to the gap drew the ship every moment.

She now was but about seventy yards from it, and the light from the lofty, upward-leaping tongues of flame could be seen from the deck.

The crew forward were half mad with terror.

Some of them sprang upon the bow. They were actually about to make a leap toward the ties, and thus insure their destruction, when Will's voice, as he came sliding to the deck, by means of a buckstay, was heard:

"Avast there! Let go that stern anchor! We may yet save the ship!"

These words inspired every one with hope.

The men flew to the anchor which still hung at the taffrail, with the short cable attached to it.

It was cleared away in a few moments.

"Now, boys!" cried Will, "capstan bars! Lively, there!"

He thrust a bar into the capstan as he spoke, and some of the men quickly had other bars in.

"Round with it!" cried the lad.

The quick tramp of the men's feet was heard, and seldom before was capstan turned at so lively a rate.

Will, looking over the taffrail, watched the anchor as it descended.

In a few seconds one of the flukes caught on a tie.

"That's it; that will do!" shouted the boy to the men at the capstan.

The iron tie was wrenched from the track timber, and a second was served in the same manner.

Breathlessly did all aboard watch the effect of this maneuver.

Tie after tie was torn away as the ship sped on.

She was now within a hundred and thirty feet of the gap.

The novel drag had greatly lessened her speed, but, as yet, it seemed doubtful if she could be stopped in time.

On she went, but it could be seen that her power upon the anchor was greatly weakened.

The ties gave way more slowly, and some of them only on one side. Presently the jib-boom of the ship projected over the fiery chasm. Her bow slid along a few feet.

Everyone aboard stood pale and horror-stricken.

The suspense was something terrible.

Still round went the wheels, though now very slowly.

Slowly—slowly—slowly the ship still seemed advancing to her doom. The fore-wheels were within eight feet of the edge of the fiery pit.

"God help us!" cried Mr. Turnwall.

Cries of terror broke from the Chinamen.

But just as the fore-wheels were not more than five feet from the edge of the flaming ravine, the anchor held to the tie about which it had last caught.

As the cable tautened, the tie bent, but did not give way.

With quivering timbers, as if she were a live thing and aware of her danger, could not help shuddering, the ship stopped.

Such a scene as then took place is beyond description.

The Chinamen rushed into each other's arms and embraced.

The engineer uttered a wild laugh as he shook hands with Will.

Then he sped to the steam-room and reversed the engine, until he had backed the vessel some yards away from the gap.

The flames were too far below the opening to set fire to the craft, but the heat was there almost unbearable.

As the vessel was again stopped Will went down to the captain's berth.

"The ship is saved, father!" he cried.

"Thank fortune! I knew there was danger, but no one came to tell me what it was."

"No," said Will; "I saw no necessity of alarming and exciting you. It might have had a bad effect on you in your present condition."

"You are a good, thoughtful boy, Will."

"Upon my word, I thought at one time we were all doomed," said the youth.

"Tell me all about it, Will."

The latter did so.

When he had finished the captain uttered a cry of blended wonder and amazement.

"Ay, ay, now bless my eyes!" he said, bringing his clenched fist down on the side of his berth; "it was a good idea of yours, my boy, but whoever heard of such a thing before?—anchoring a ship on land!"

"It was more like anchoring her in the air!" laughed Will, "as we are over two hundred feet above the ravine, along the walls of which the track timbers are laid on ledges. But for the iron ties, laid crosswise to keep them firm, and which afforded a hold for the anchor-fluke, we could not have saved ourselves."

"Ay, it was a narrow escape, but we certainly can have no more."

"Why?"

"That's plain enough. The bridge being burned away, how is Turnwall to keep on?"

Will reflected, ere he answered:

"I am afraid he will contrive some way. He will wait until the fire below has stopped, and then lay some kind of a platform over the gap for the ship to cross. I heard him say something to that effect to Charley, before I came into the cabin."

"True—there are some good stout pieces of timber in the hold," remarked the captain. "He brought them on purpose, in case it should be necessary to make repairs."

"Do you think we can lay them firmly enough for the ship to cross?"

"How wide is the chasm?"

"About fifteen feet, I should say."

"Then he can do it. The timbers are twenty-five feet long."

"Don't you think, father, that after what has happened, we would be justified in leaving Turnwall? He has proved himself to be mad. You did not know he was so when you made your promise."

"No, I don't think he is exactly mad. He is a sort of monomaniac—that is all, and I knew that before."

"I have no more to say then, about that, but it grieves me deeply, father, to think that you, even as a cripple, are to be exposed to further peril."

"I shall not be a cripple long, boy. Thanks to Gorlona, who is skilled in medicine, I hope soon to be on deck."

Having conversed awhile longer with his father, who always seemed cheered by his presence, Will left the cabin.

Meanwhile the fires under the gap left by the lost bridge, were becoming lower. In the afternoon a heavy rain extinguished them.

Turnwall spent most of the rest of the day in getting up the timber in the hold.

He showed the men how to shape them, and they were soon at work.

On the following morning, the work was resumed, and, soon after noon, by means of tackles and other appliances, the engineer had laid the timbers over the gap, joined firmly together, and covered by iron plates, of which he had a supply.

Over this bridge the ship was slowly and carefully directed, and the grooves of her wheels finally set themselves on the track, beyond.

Then the craft was kept on her way as rapidly as possible.

CHAPTER XII.

THE AMBUSH AT THE CROSSING.

"Do you see them, Charley?"

"Yes."

It was Will who put the question.

It was dark, and Turnwall, according to his custom of stopping the ship at night, had shut off the steam-works.

The vessel occupied a position to the right of a steep cliff of the mountain, towering far above her, with the summits of other cliffs beyond.

Upon one of the latter, evidently pursuing an old bridle-path, much used by muleteers, the indistinct forms of a large party of men could be dimly seen, by the light of several lanterns.

It was a misty night, and the forms of these men were magnified to four times their natural size.

But their real shapes could not be made out in the mist.

They looked like huge, moving, phantom shadows.

Two animals, evidently mules, well packed, were being led along by a couple of the foremost men.

In the mist these beasts of burden looked strangely grotesque, as they, too, were magnified by the vapor.

"What do you think of them?" continued Will, who, with Charley, stood leaning against the after rail.

"I do not think they are anything more than muleteers."

"I think they are some of the party from the brig."

"I hope not. If they are, I'm afraid they mean mischief."

The boys watched the forms moving on along the brow of the mountain, until at length they were lost to view.

Soon after the lads retired to their berths, but not until they had told Mr. Turnwall, who was seated in the cabin studying a chart of his railroad, what they had seen.

The engineer, always hopeful, said he thought they were merely some muleteers on their way from Panama to Chagres.

He scouted the idea of their being of the party from the brig.

"Depend upon it," he said, "our enemies have had enough of it, and have given up their intention of tormenting us further. What with the punishment they lately got from us and the suffering, if not injuries, they received from that terrific hurricane, they must have become tired of following us."

But Will did not think so.

When he was in his berth he lay long awake under the influence of a strange uneasiness, which seemed almost like a presentiment.

After breakfast next day both boys were again on deck.

Mr. Turnwall, with his assistants, presently moved toward the steam-room.

"Have we any more dangerous places to cross, father?" inquired Charley.

"Of course," answered the engineer, "there is danger everywhere, but I think we will cross the river safely."

"A river?"

"Yes. It is about twenty yards wide, in a valley of the mountains, two hundred feet below my railroad, which crosses it."

"How did the engineers contrive to get the railroad across so wide a space?"

"Nature has assisted us with huge masses of rock, flat on their tops, but thick and rugged where attached to the cliff, from which each projects."

"How far do they project?"

"They project about fifteen feet toward each other over the river, so that the gap which the road crosses is but thirty feet wide. The timbers laid across it to support the rails, are strong and thick."

Meeting Will, the engineer continued:

"Better make sail, my boy. There seems to be a good breeze, and it is clear, bright weather."

"It will not be so long," answered the young sailor. "I think we will have another hurricane in a few hours."

And he pointed out a sort of yellowish haze overhanging a portion of the sky.

"Never mind. Make sail for the present, at any rate. We are now on a slight down grade of the rail, and have a chance for better speed, of which I wish to take advantage."

The speaker then descended into the steam-chamber, and the ship was soon on her way.

Will set the lower canvas, and also the topsails and to'-gallant sails.

It appeared to him that they were of little use, for so great was now the speed of the vessel on the down grade, that she seemed to draw the canvas nearly away from the wind.

On went the stately craft while scenes of wild, rural beauty were visible on every hand.

The sides of the mountains were clothed with verdure, and here and there, long vines and trailing flowers—the latter of every hue greeted the sight.

A sweet fragrance was upon the air.

Down in the valleys could be seen the cabbage-tree, the banana and the plantain, the pine-apple, and the tall sugar-cane.

Here and there the hut of some native showed itself amidst the green foliage.

The sun shone brightly upon the wings of the many gorgeous birds, whose songs were heard on every hand.

The parrot, the wild peacock and turkey, together with the heron and many other kinds of the feathered tribe were seen sailing through the air.

Occasionally, far down in the valleys, a native would be observed, looking up in wonder at the stately vessel speeding along on wheels.

Even the troops of monkeys that were in the groves would cease their chattering, and seem to gaze in astonishment at the unwonted spectacle approaching their domains.

As the ship drew near these creatures with loud shrieks, would scramble away, leaping from branch to branch, until out of sight in the dense foliage.

Still on went the ship, and presently, the river which she was to cross could be seen in the distance by Will, who had mounted to the mainmast's gallant cross-trees.

Thick masses of sulphurous-looking clouds were now rushing over the sky.

The sun was obscured, the mountains and the valleys were darkened, and far away Will fancied he could already hear the hum of the coming tempest.

"Better take in sail, sir," he shouted to Mr. Turnwall, as he descended, hand over hand to the deck by means of a backstay.

The engineer looked out of the hatchway.

"Time enough, time enough yet," he said. "I don't want to lose my advantage. The grade is now become level and the sails help the craft."

At length the ship drew near the flat rock, upon which were laid the timbers crossing the river to the other rock on the opposite side.

Far down could be seen the waters of this river, two hundred feet below.

"I wonder how deep it is?" said Will to Charley.

"Deep enough to float a schooner, I believe," answered Charley.

"Hark!" said Will, "the tempest is drawing near. Truly, this may well be called Hurricane Coast. We should take in those sails."

"Do you think the tempest will strike us before we cross?"

"Ay, I'm afraid it will."

Speeding on, the ship gracefully rounded the curve which brought her over the flat rock.

At the same moment an advance gust of the tempest broke forth.

It was nearly astern but the ship began to reel.

"Better take in sail now," cried Will to Mr. Turnwall. "The tempest is close at hand."

"Very well," answered the engineer, as he came on deck.

The moment he did so, and looked ahead, he uttered a cry of dismay and ran back to the steam-room.

The two boys quickly perceived the cause of the cry he had uttered.

Exactly in the center of the gap, between the two opposite projecting rocks, one of the rails was suddenly being jerked away by a man on the further rock.

A rope had been tied to the end of the rail, which latter must previously have been unfastened.

The rope was arranged so as to lead down under the timber to the man on the rock.

This man wore the attire of a sailor, and was evidently one of the party from the Spanish brig.

By pulling on the rope, he was displacing the rail to which it was fastened.

At the same time others of the brig's party sprang from the thick shrubbery, just back of their companion, uttering demoniacal yells of triumph.

One of them was immediately recognized by the boys as the same officer who, days before, had come in the boat from the brig to demand an explanation of the shots fired by accident from the coffee mill.

Waving his sword, this person shouted:

"At last, at last, Jose Turnwall, do we destroy you and your ship! We would have preferred to capture you alive, but having had no chance for that, we now send you to your doom!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AWFUL PLUNGE.

MEANWHILE topsail and topgallant halyards had been let go, and Turnwall was making every effort to stop his ship.

But round and round went the wheels, and still onward did she rush, apparently to her fate!

Two hundred feet below into the river did it seem as if she was soon to be hurled!

But Will again thought of that stern anchor which had previously saved the craft.

Though there were no ties here for the fluke to catch upon, might not the curved end of that fluke fasten itself upon the woodwork so as to check, if not arrest the vessel's progress?

"Quick, Charley, the anchor!" shouted the boy to his friend.

The lads thrust bars into the capstan, and, as it could be easily turned by two persons, they quickly lowered the anchor, which now hung over the taffrail in readiness to be dropped at any moment.

The fluke of the instrument struck one of the timbers and tore through the woodwork, decreasing, but not stopping, the ship's headway.

With a dismal rumble like hollow thunder, her fore wheels struck the part of the timber from which the rail had been removed and the splitting of the wood was heard.

With a bump and a grating, jarring noise her after wheels left the track!

Her headway, nearly stopped by the anchor, by Turnwall's efforts and by the sinking of the forward wheels into the timber, her stern swung round over the edge of the track!

She did not go over, but she keeled almost on her beam ends, and there she lay, diagonally across the track, balanced upon her lower edge.

It was a frightful position.

Overhanging the depths so far below, it seemed as if but little was needed to throw her from her insecure balance into the abyss beneath!

The terrified crew of Chinamen, as well as Turnwall's two assistants, ran to the part of the tilted rail, from which it seemed easy to reach the track timbers.

But, as they climbed down from the ship, this side of which was toward the rock upon which stood the brig's party, the latter fired a pistol volley at them.

With terrible screams, three of the Chinamen, mortally wounded, fell clinging to the track-timber a moment, and then dropped into the river, two hundred feet beneath.

At the same moment the full violence of the hurricane burst forth. Those of the ship's men who had escaped the bullets of the brig's people were hurled, like so many straws, from their insecure footing on the track timber.

Down—down were they carried, one wild, simultaneous cry breaking from their lips ere they struck the river, in which they sank to rise no more!

Meanwhile, the hurricane catching the ship sternways, tilted her upward.

In another moment she must have made the fatal plunge had it not been for Will.

"Stand clear, all!" shrieked the boy, as with an ax he cut away the mizzen stays and shrouds.

Down went the mast, falling lengthways along the ship, just missing the steam-pipe.

Then, making his way through the debris of tangled ropes, rigging and sails, Will, assisted by Charley, also cut away the main-mast, which, in falling, carried away the fore-topmast.

Entangled in ropes, sails, cordage, and strewed with broken spars, the ship now was a mere wreck.

But Will's prompt action had saved the vessel from falling at once.

She swayed upon the track, but she did not go over.

It was evident, however, that she must soon make the fatal plunge.

Every moment seemed as if it would be her last.

As more of her forward part than her stern was over the edge of the track, every time she was tilted by the hurricane she slipped along a few inches nearer her doom.

"We must work quickly," said Will, "if we would save ourselves."

"But how are we to do so?" said Mr. Turnwall. "Alas! I feel myself the cause of the loss of those who have already perished, and care not how soon I meet my fate."

"No, father," cried Charley. "Though it has been the attempt to carry out your plan that has brought about these awful results, you have done no intentional wrong."

The din of the tempest, together with the noise of the fallen flapping canvas rendered it necessary for the speakers to shout to make themselves heard.

Will, seizing the rope-ladder, attached two ropes to the end of it and flung the ladder over the further elevated side of the ship.

The lower ropes secured to it now touched one of the track timbers, and though the ladder was blown inward by the force of the gale, it could be descended with the exercise of a little care.

"Now," said Will, "if we are careful we can creep along on hands and knees to the flat rock."

"Here, you go first, my lad," said Mr. Turnwall to the little Kanaka cabin-boy, who stood near, trembling in every limb, his teeth chattering with terror.

The boy obeyed.

He safely reached the track, and began to creep toward the flat rock.

The half Indian, though requesting to be the last to leave the ship, was made to go next.

"Now for my father!" cried Will, darting into the cabin.

He met Captain Trueman staggering up the inclined deck.

"Quick, father, there is no time to lose!" he cried.

"What is it, Will? though I need not ask. I know something terrible has happened—that the ship is doomed!"

"There's no time for explanations, father. Come!"

The boy, holding his father under one shoulder, and with an arm about his waist, helped him along to the foot of the companion-steps.

With Charley's and Mr. Turnwall's assistance, the cripple was got to the deck.

"I don't think you'll have time to save me, my friends," said Trueman, as he looked about him. "The ship must go over in a few seconds. Take care of yourselves. No use of sacrificing your lives for nothing."

"No, no!" cried Will. "We will have time, if we work quickly."

As he spoke, he fastened a rope about the captain's breast, under his arms.

He was then lifted over the taffrail by Will and Mr. Turnwall, while Charley stood below to help him when he should be lowered to the track timber.

"That will do. I can see to him now," said the captain's son, after Trueman was lowered. "You, Charley, and your father can keep ahead to give assistance, if needed."

"I am much better than I was," said the captain, "and can creep along the timber. Don't be alarmed on my account."

He stood close against the side of the ship still held by the rope.

Taking a knife from his pocket and opening it, he severed the rope.

Then he got down on his hands and knees and moved along the timber.

"Good!" said Charley, who had followed close behind him, ready to assist him if necessary.

Mr. Turnwall and Will were soon creeping along after the twain ahead.

Suddenly they heard a loud creaking sound, and looking behind them, they saw the ship sliding off the track.

A tremendous gust of wind had lifted her stern, so that the forward part now projected far enough over the edge of the timber to deprive the hull of its temporary balance.

The next moment, bow foremost, it pitched into the abyss below.

Down—down it went, until, with a tremendous crash, it clove the waters two hundred feet below, and striking the sandy bottom of the river its bow was split to fragments, the other part of the hull sticking fast with the sides projecting high above the surface.

"There goes my craft! There's an end to my glorious plan of crossing the isthmus in a ship on wheels!" cried Turnwall.

The falling of the hull, which had hidden the little party from the gaze of the brig's people on the opposite rock, now exposed them to their view.

A fierce shout broke from them, and they fired a pistol volley, but in that hurricane they could not take steady aim, and their shots went wide of the mark, except that one struck the blade of an ax which Will had lashed to his shoulder.

Not long after Turnwall and his companions were among the hollows of the earth-covered rocks in the shrubbery which grew thickly on the side of the mountain cliff.

Then the engineer looked sadly down at his ship's broken hull in the river, and at the fragments of her bow and booms as they floated off with the current.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PERILOUS DESCENT.

"WELL," said Captain Trueman, "here we are in this wilderness without arms or food, with our enemies on the other side of us, and myself at present a cripple. What are we to do now?"

"We can only make our way to a valley on the other side of this cliff, in which are the huts of some of the natives, and where we can perhaps get a muleteer to take you with us to Panama," said Turnwall.

"You forget those fellows opposite us. They do not mean to let us reach Panama."

"No," said Charley; "as soon as the hurricane subsides they will make for us."

"You are mistaken."

"How, father?"

"The part of the timbers where the ship was is almost broken in two. There was an awful strain on them when the ship was twisted round, with that anchor catching in the beams and the fore wheels crushing the wood work."

As he spoke the engineer pointed to the half-broken timbers with great gaps in them and the wood sunken in, where it had nearly split in twain.

"It seems to me the timbers will hold together some time longer while there is no great pressure on them," remarked the captain.

"They may, but in my opinion the Spaniards will be afraid to cross them while in that state."

"Excuse me, sir," said Will, "but as that is only surmise on your part, would it not be best to make sure work of those timbers? A few blows with an ax would sever them in twain."

"That would be perilous work," said Turnwall. "The workman would be exposed to the shots of the foe, and even if he escaped them there would be danger of the part of the timber on which he stood giving way as soon as the other did, though there is a bare chance that it might not."

"Could not those fellows get to us if the timbers were cut away?" asked Charley.

"Only by crossing a stone bridge, about three miles from here," answered his father.

Soon after the hurricane had considerably abated, and the faint outlines of several of the brig's party were seen through a mist that had fallen, creeping along the timbers of the track.

"Now," reflected Will, with flashing eyes, "now is my time."

Mr. Turnwall, with the steward's and Charley's help, accompanied by the cabin boy, was assisting the captain toward the valley of which he had spoken.

These persons being in a curve of the cliff, could not see Will, who had lingered behind to watch their foes.

Anxious for the safety of all, and especially for his father's, the boy resolved to undertake the hazardous task of cutting asunder the half-broken timbers.

With the ax still slung to his back, he crept out toward this weakened part of the track logs, which he soon reached.

The mist on his side being thicker than that which enveloped his foes, they did not see him—did not even know he was there, until they suddenly heard the blows of his ax.

Sitting astraddle of the timber, behind some thick coils of rope, which had dropped upon it from the maintop of the ship when the mast fell, Will vigorously plied his ax.

"Who's there? Who is that?" called one of the party.

The boy made no answer.

Crash! went his ax again through the woodwork.

A shot was fired—then another and another.

Two of them whizzed close to the lad's ears.

The other struck one of the coils of rope, and so did him no harm.

It now occurred to Will that, as that part of the bridge on which he sat might give way, it would be well to take precautions to meet such an event.

He laid his ax across his lap, and took a secure hitch about the part of the timber behind him with the end of one of the coils of rope.

Then, twisting a slack part of the rope about his wrists, he continued his work.

Two more blows with the ax severed the timber. Then there was a creaking noise, followed by a crash and a yell.

The timber opposite the lad had given way.

This being connected by a wooden brace beyond, with the other one—the latter also fell.

The Spaniards who had been creeping toward the lad were precipitated with the timber they had occupied into the depths so far below.

A simultaneous cry of dismay broke from them.

Then there was a splash and all was still.

A moment later, Will could hear the excited voices of the baffled party whose shipmates had just been lost.

He had felt a jerk upon his wrists.

It was caused by the falling with the timber of the coil of rope, which had unwound as it dropped toward the river.

He felt the timber upon which he sat beginning to yield—to give way.

He got himself round, intending to creep quickly toward the flat rock, twenty feet distant, on his return.

But ere he could move in that direction, the timber, weakened by the falling of the part beyond, sank under him.

For a moment a thrill of horror passed through him.

He gave himself up for lost.

But the timber did not entirely give way.

It reached nearly a perpendicular slant, and there it remained, still held by a brace attached to the rock.

Thus was the boy left hanging, about two hundred feet above the river, every moment expecting to be sent to his doom.

Creak, creak, crack, crack! went the timber.

It was too thick for Will to obtain sufficient hold of it with his arms and legs to climb along its length back to the rock.

Every moment he expected the timber would give way.

The shouts and yells of the Spaniards indicated that they now could indistinctly see him through the mist.

Bang, bang, bang! went pistol after pistol, and the bullets whizzed about the lad's ears.

There was but one hope—but one alternative for him now.

This was to attempt to descend by the rope, which, as stated, he had fastened to the timber and wound about his wrists. To this rope he was now clinging.

Far below him he could see the end almost touching the deck of the fallen ship's hull in the river.

No time was to be lost.

The boy commenced the descent.

Down—down he rapidly went.

Shot after shot whizzed about him, fired by the Spaniards above.

Again and again the youth shouted to apprise his friends of the situation.

But it was evident that the shouts and yells of the Spaniards would prevent his voice from reaching those to whom he called, who, as previously stated, were now on the other side of the cliff.

It did not take the young sailor long to make the descent.

He found the end of the rope hanging within seven feet of the deck of the wreck.

Lightly upon the deck he dropped, and crouching behind the bulwarks, he was safe from the shots of his enemies above.

There the mist hid from his gaze the timber from which he had descended.

He entered the companionway and made his way to the cabin.

There the water was up to his ankles.

He could hear the swash of water in the hold, and there was a wide crack in the cabin floor.

The draught of the ship and moderate depth of the river kept the water from rising higher.

The vessel swayed but little.

Her wheels, on both sides, were evidently firmly imbedded in the sandy bottom.

Looking in the pantry, the lad saw the provisions there tumbled about, but otherwise undisturbed.

When he returned to the deck and looked up, he saw nothing of the Spaniards on the flat rock.

The mist having cleared away, he soon perceived them some distance off, moving along the rocky wall of the river, probably making for the stone bridge of which Mr. Turnwall had spoken.

As he looked toward them, he heard a noise like the crack of a thunderbolt above him, and soon saw what caused it.

The track-timber from which he had descended had fallen clear of its weakened support, and was whizzing down through the air.

It struck the river within five fathoms of the rock, and slowly floated off.

Will now looked through the hatchway of the steam-room.

The water had surged through the broken bow all about the works.

Rods, pistons, cylinder, valve-gear, crank, feed-pump and all the other complicated attachments of the engine were jammed or broken, and twisted out of shape.

The boy partly descending the staircase, was sadly surveying the ruin before him, when he imagined he faintly heard some one calling his name.

He ran on deck, and looking above him, he could see Charley standing on the edge of the flat rock, so far above.

"Oh! Will! Will! Thank God, you are safe!" cried Charley, in astonishment. "But how came you there?"

CHAPTER XV. CONCLUSION.

WILL waved his hat to his friend.

Then, in a few words he explained how he had descended to the wreck, after cutting away the broken timber, and thus preventing the foe from crossing.

"Hooray! I say it was a brave deed!" cried Charley.

"Did not you hear the fellows firing at me?" inquired Will.

"We all heard the shots, but, thinking you were following us, we did not know our enemies were aiming at you. We thought they believed we were still in the shrubbery on the other side of them, and were trying to pick us off."

"How is father, and where is he?"

"He is doing well, says he feels better than he did, since the accident. He is still descending into the valley, helped by my father and Gorlonu the steward."

"The Spaniards evidently are making for the stone bridge. They probably mean to attack you if they succeed in finding you."

"No danger of that now," cried Charley, joyfully.

"What do you mean?"

"There is a regiment of soldiers from Panama quartered among the huts in the valley. An officer from them met us and told us so. They have made a halt for the present, but are on their way to Chagres."

"Good! good!" cried Will. "It must have been some of that regiment we saw moving along the brow of the mountain last night."

"I think so. You see we are no longer in danger of being attacked."

"No, but here I am unable to join you. The walls of the cliff, on both sides, are too steep to climb."

"I'll tell father, and we'll have a canoe, before long, sent to pick you up."

"All right," answered Will. "Tell father not to worry about me—that I am safe enough where I am, at present."

A few more words were exchanged between the boys, after which Charley started on his return to the valley.

Hours passed.

Will, from the provisions in the pantry, made a good meal,

Scarcely had he finished it, when he noticed that the heavens were again darkening.

Huge clouds were driven along the sky, and he heard the roar of another tempest approaching.

"There is going to be another specimen storm of this 'hurricane coast,'" reflected the lad. "I hope the wind will not sweep in my direction. If it does, good-bye to the half-broken wreck!"

It was not long ere Will perceived three canoes approaching.

They came from the direction of the stone bridge to which Mr. Turnwall had alluded.

The boy perceived that each canoe contained five occupants.

"They are not friends, coming to pick me up, of course," he reflected. "If so, there would not be so many of them."

He found the ship's glass, and an inspection through it of the canoes showed him that the men in them were his enemies.

Evidently they had heard of the regiment of soldiers, and were endeavoring to avoid contact with them.

The river would lead them to a distant point, whence they could make their way back to the Pacific coast.

But it was evident to the boy that they would not pass without molesting him.

In fact, as they drew nearer, he saw some of them pointing to the wreck.

Will obtained a cutlass from the cabin.

He knew the foe would grant him no quarter, and so thought he might as well show fight.

Unfortunately all the ammunition aboard had been damaged by water.

He could make no use of fire-arms.

Nearer drew the canoes.

The occupants were careful to fire no shots, lest they should attract the attention of the soldiery in the valley.

Grasping knives and cutlasses, some of the men stood up, when the canoes were within three ships' lengths of the vessel.

But, at that moment the tempest—a furious hurricane broke forth.

The wind blew directly along the river, and the rain descended fast.

In a few minutes the river seemed to become a torrent.

Boiling and foaming, the waters rushed furiously along, sweeping over the canoes and whirling them sideways, when over they went.

For a few moments Will saw the late occupants, as they were swept past the vessel, struggling with the mad waters.

Then they disappeared in the foaming vortex and were seen no more. Meanwhile the ship swayed violently.

The river, evidently swelled by torrents beyond pouring into it, rose higher.

The force of the strong current lifted the wrecked craft from the sandy bottom.

She struck the bottom with a thump on her side, as she went over on her beam ends.

Then, the rushing torrent dashing against her, she was again lifted and turned bottom up, with her four wheels showing on each side.

Will had clutched the weather bulwarks aft, and as the vessel turned over, he gave a spring and grasped the metal bar to which the two hind wheels were attached.

Thus he was enabled to climb upon the ship's flat bottom to which he clung, holding to the iron cross-bar.

The stumps of the three masts having been driven deep into the sand, the vessel was held in this position.

The foaming waters kept breaking over her, but Will clung firmly to the cross-bar.

There was a gap in the ship's bottom showing that the hull must, ere long, split open.

In fact just as the tempest gave signs of abating, the ship was riven in twain.

Will saved himself by clutching a hanging rope, on one of the parted fragments, as it turned half over, and drifted down the river.

The turbulence of the waters gradually subsided, as the violence of the gale decreased.

The boy, much exhausted, still clung to the piece of wreck.

At about dusk it was swept into the shallow water of a small bay with a beach on one side to which the lad made his way.

He was so worn out with his late hardships and exertions that he sank down, heedless of his drenched garments, under an overhanging rock and fell into a deep slumber.

He did not awake until early the following morning.

Then he arose and ascending the cliff, moved along in search of the valley where he hoped to find his friends.

He had not proceeded far when he beheld two forms advancing in the distance.

As they drew nearer he recognized Charley and Mr. Turnwall.

"Thank God, you are safe!" cried the engineer.

"Ay, Will," said Charley. "We had given you up for lost. We had succeeded after a long hunt in obtaining a canoe just above the stone bridge when the hurricane came, and we were unable to launch it into the river."

"We walked along the cliff in the storm, but it was a long time before we reached the place opposite to where the wreck had been.

"When we perceived that the wreck was gone we feared you had perished. Finally, feeling almost sure of this after a vain lookout for you, we went back to the valley. This was at dusk, but we resolved to continue our search in the morning. We started early, and you can judge how glad we now are to meet you."

Will, on the way with the two to the valley, gave an account of the fate of their enemies and his own narrow escape.

Finally they reached the valley, and it were hard to describe the joy and pride of Captain Trueman when he saw his boy alive and well and heard his story.

The three set out that very day for Chagres, in company with the Panama regiment.

On the next day they reached a winding of the Chagres river, and performed the rest of the journey in boats and canoes.

Captain Trueman and his son made but a brief stay at Chagres.

They parted from Mr. Turnwall and his son for a passage home aboard a steamer anchored off the town.

In due time they reached New York, where Mr. Trueman finally regained the use of his injured limb.

A whole year passed ere Will received a letter from Charley informing him of his father's death at Panama, where he had died of a fever after a prolonged illness of several months.

Previous to that he and his parent had been superintending the work of removing all trace of the railroad.

The failure of his plan and the loss of life it had entailed had induced Mr. Turnwall to give up all further attempts at crossing the Isthmus in a SHIP ON WHEELS.

[THE END.]

ROGER STARBUCK the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in THE 5 CENT WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY: No. 1027, "The Demon Captain; or, The Doomed Boys of the Gun-Ship." No. 1021, "Two Boy Wanderers; or, The Chums of the Lost Island." No. 1012, "Black Brow, the Pirate; or, The Cruiser of the Dark River." No. 1004, "The Mysterious Light-Ship; or, The Smugglers of the Death Coast." No. 1000, "The Pirates of the Black Cave; or, The Mystery of the Hidden Lake." No. 991, "The Boy Wrecker; or, The Young Pilot of the Breakers." No. 986, "The Lost Boy Captain; or, The Secret of the Hidden Whirlpool."

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